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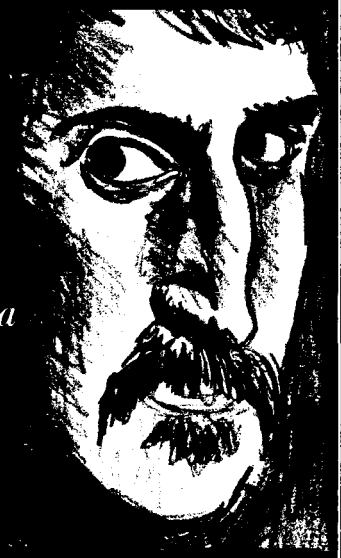
The Empire Strikes Out: Roundtable on Populist Politics

Anderson, Berman, Luke, Piccone and Taves

SPECIAL SECTION ON MUSICOLOGY: *Popular Music from Adorno . . . . . to Zappa*



Theodor W. Adorno: *Marginalia on Mahler (1936)*
Ulrich Schönherr: *Adorno and Jazz*
Robert Hullot-Kentor: *The Impossibility of Music*
Florindo Volpacchio: *Music and Emancipation?*
Frank Zappa: *On Music and Society: An Interview*

Gerard Raulet: *The New Utopia: Communication Technologies*
Russell A. Berman: *Popular Culture and Populist Culture*
Robert Hullot-Kentor: *Theory of the Future*
Paul Piccone: *Does Critical Theory Need Saints or Foundations?*
Russell A. Berman: *The Power of the Press*
Maxy Beml: *Stalinism In These Times*
John Bokina: *The Disharmony of the Spheres*
John Alt: *Racial Politics and the City*
Jeanne Schuler: *Marx and Modernism*

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Telos

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Table of Contents

Discussions

The Empire Strikes Out: A Roundtable on Populist Politics 3
Kenneth Anderson, Russell A. Berman, Tim Luke, Paul Piccone and Michael Taves

Articles

The New Utopia: Communication Technologies 39
Gérard Raulet

Popular Culture and Populist Culture 59
Russell A. Berman

SPECIAL SECTION ON MUSICOLOGY

Introduction: Popular Music from Adorno to Zappa 71
Russell A. Berman and Robert D'Amico

Marginalia on Mahler 79
Theodor W. Adorno

Adorno and Jazz: Reflections on a Failed Encounter 85
Ulrich Schönherr

The Impossibility of Music: Adorno, Popular and Other Music 97
Robert Hullot-Kentor

The Unhappy Marriage of Music and Emancipation 118
Florindo Volpacchio

The Mother of All Interviews: Zappa on Music and Society .. 124
Florindo Volpacchio

Polemics

Theory of the Future 137
Robert Hullot-Kentor

Does Critical Theory Need Saints or Foundations? 146
Paul Piccone

The Power of the Press: Danny Gets the Goods 158
Russell A. Berman

Stalinism in These Times 161
Maxy Beml

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Reviews

The Disharmony of the Spheres 167
On: Susan McClary, *Feminine Endings*
John Bokina

Racial Politics and the City 173
On: Jim Sleeper, *The Closest of Strangers*
John Alt

Marx and Modernism 185
On: David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*
Jeanne Schuler

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*The Empire Strikes Out: A Roundtable on Populist Politics**

Kenneth Anderson, Russell A. Berman, Tim Luke, Paul Piccone and Michael Taves

Taves: This roundtable is predicated on the notion that the state has struck out in its gameplan to regulate social life while safeguarding an active political life. New Deal liberalism and the resulting supremacy of individual rights over the common good, together with related phenomena such as a considerable social mobility and the homogenizing effects of mass culture, have undermined the social and cultural bases of traditional communities. The strategy was to create an ever-increasing number of individual rights, enforced by a constantly expanding New Class bureaucracy, which eroded community autonomy and any vestige of local self-determination. Thus there are constant calls for a new politics in response to the undemocratic and unrepresentative character of the political system.

The only meaningful politics today is special interest politics. Those not actively involved in political decision-making or whose interests seem to be violated over a particular issue feel no obligation to the polity as a whole and therefore have no serious reservations about engaging in civil disobedience — as if it were a normal approach to collective self-determination. A truly democratic politics requires active grassroots participation, whereby rights are directly tied to obligations.

Having failed to come up with any alternative new politics over the last two decades, the New Left has gradually appropriated the old politics by extending the principle of proportional representation along ethnic, racial and gender lines, as if a more equitable distribution of irrationality and injustice would somehow make them more palatable. More recently, and ironically, a newer and academically fashionable postmodern Left goes so far as to dismiss all normative visions as "master narratives" concealing new modes of domination. Thus it legitimates by default all values, traditional or otherwise, simply because they exist, and promotes special managerial New Class interests and whatever support they can effectively mediatize. The project of empowering people as citizens in political affairs, freely determining how to live and what

* This Roundtable was held in New York City on February 16, 1991.

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to become, has shifted elsewhere. Focused on structures which mediate the reproduction of everyday life, populist calls for local control are increasingly becoming the raw stuff of democracy. Is a new populist politics concerned with a revitalization of community possible today?

This question is crucial, given that the twin New Class pillars of bureaucracy and rights have become increasingly suspect. In his recent book, *The True and Only Heaven*, Christopher Lasch defends the lower middle class rejections of the idea of progress at any cost and the virtue of accepting limits and communal obligations as essential components of personal politics and identity. Even George Bush, in his State of the Union Address, joined in this criticism of the New Class and in the call for a populist resurgence by pointing out that "the strength of democracy is not in bureaucracy but in community and families" — even if this endorsement may have to do primarily with maintaining high approval ratings in opinion polls.

In any event, this Roundtable should focus on the extent to which this new populism can generate a new politics. Of course, no discussion of populism can begin without a prior examination of the status of communities in the US today. The outlook is not rosy. In an earlier *Telos* roundtable on communitarianism (*Telos* 76 [Summer 1988], pp. 3-32) we discussed the consequences of New Class domination and bureaucratically-enforced rights as having resulted in the homogenization of the polity and the erasure of all particularity, specificity and otherness in "really existing communities." The only conclusion was that conditions conducive to the maintenance of constitutive community in the US were rapidly giving way to a dependent individualism, inextricably intertwined with the bureaucratic state and the ideology of unlimited individual rights. Calls for community were thus seen as either nostalgia for a past long gone or for voluntary associations which, while useful for upward mobility, did not have the totalizing spiritual impact of constitutive communities.

This roundtable will reassess this conclusion and inquire into whether new kinds of community are possible — communities which are neither merely contractual voluntary associations nor recreations of the worst features of the bigoted, tribal and cloistered traditional communities. It will consider the prospects for a populist as contraposed to a popular culture — a culture fostering the revitalization of an equally eroded federal framework to make possible a *participatory* democracy able to checkmate the typically alienating shortcomings of representative democracy. The discussion will proceed with reference to three topics: 1) a new populist politics; 2) the restructuring of truly constitutive communities within a strong federal framework; 3) a new populist culture.

Piccone: In order to establish some continuity between the analyses we have developed over the past twenty years and the new populist turn, it may be useful to summarize our trajectory from Western Marxism to Critical Theory to a post-Critical Theory perspective in "Six Theses on the Inevitability of Populism." The use of the word "inevitability" is intentional: it is an exaggeration

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to emphasize continuity with our Marxist heritage understood both as the most recent reformulation of the emancipatory project implicit in Western civilization as well as its most problematic subversion in a self-destructive Enlightenment ideology. The nomological character of this inevitability is a function of its imbededness within a particular historical project seeking universality — a project presently in a deep crisis, resolvable probably only through a regrounding of Enlightenment pseudo-universality within a multitude of particularities whose organic development is the *sine qua non conditio* for getting the original project back on track. In this sense, the main point to emphasize is that populist politics and the reconstruction of a strong federal framework to sustain it is not a mere *desideratum* but flows objectively from the very logic of the present system as the embodiment of the project in crisis and the need to deal with the growing social crisis it tends to generate.

1) Political participation today, as codified in the predominant political system, reduces to technocratic routine and has become thereby fundamentally depoliticized. If it insists on remaining political in any meaningful sense by rejecting this technocratic "normality" it is ignored and otherwise bureaucratically dismissed. The only way to gain recognition is to take on the form of spectacular politics by pursuing the media's attention. To the extent that the media pays attention only to the extraordinary, this political activity tends to take the form of civil disobedience. This spectacularization of politics turns out to be the exception which reaffirms the rule: in Hegelian terms, abstract negation *par excellence*.

2) The spectacularization of politics requires the prepackaging of whatever political issue is advocated to fit the media form: issues must be well-defined, self-contained, and axiologically obvious. Ambiguities are edited out and the context is assumed as "normal." As such, all politics reduces to single-issue politics amenable to automatic moralistic formatting and, in this atomized form, ready for subsequent technocratic processing. Here the achievement of political objectives is in principle possible only by tentatively accepting the otherwise depoliticizing rules of the game with, at best, minor alterations. The eventual technocratic cooptation is already prefigured by the very act of spectacularizing politics.

3) During the age of "one-dimensionality" (i.e., when the bureaucratic apparatus assumed that all problems could be resolved by administrative means once all residual social irrationalities were eliminated) this state of affairs was interpreted as the articulation of an ever expanding capitalist hegemony. During the age of artificial negativity (i.e., after the apparent collapse of all opposition and resistance) it takes on a new, defensive, neocorporatist meaning. While capitalist relations are no longer questioned, and even less threatened, the myth of the totally administered society explodes with the realization that such a utopia is *in principle* impossible to achieve. The reduction of lived reality to the conceptual structures deployed to apprehend it leaves a residue that constantly resurfaces: social

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pathologies as unintended consequences necessitating an ever growing bureaucratic intervention. This intervention, however, is counterproductive, since it ends up strengthening the conditions that originally necessitated it, thus intensifying rather than resolving the problem to the point that it threatens the very preconditions for further intervention, i.e., productivity, rationality, motivation, etc. Since this intervention requires a legal justification, it is part of the same phenomenon Carl Schmitt described as "motorized legislation" which, along with super-legality, becomes a threat to the system's reproducibility. From the viewpoint of the system, the objective is no longer planning and execution but crisis management to guarantee internal stability in the face of unforeseen and unforeseeable disruptions generated by bureaucratic over-administration and ritualistically articulated through civil disobedience. Class domination dissipates into classless chaos and political battle-lines are redrawn: the traditional class struggle between labor and capital, the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, becomes redefined in terms of a new confrontation between populist problems and New Class pseudo-solutions.

4) Politics as the articulation of interests within a self-regulated society thus gives way to spectacular politics as the articulation of frozen moralities within an increasingly delegitimated legal framework. Politics as civil disobedience hypostatizes morality above legality and threatens to destroy it. The result is super-legality and a systematic delegitimation of the social glue that keeps the established order together — popular trust. No state can effectively function with these conditions. The collapse of communist regimes is only the most extreme manifestation of this phenomenon.

5) Besieged by fiscal, ecological, and motivational crises, the compromised existing order can no longer deliver on its promises. The New Deal social contract, whereby the technocracy was to guarantee stability and well-being in return for uncontested political power, tends to break down. Corrupted by super-legality, i.e., the hypostatization of particular values over and above the legal structure, the old legal foundation loses its universal validity and, as one particular code among others, can only be relegitimated locally, in a context where it can once again re-establish continuity with morality and formalize it. A larger, formal, federal legal structure can only be rebuilt on the basis of strong autonomous communities operating within their indigenous axiological frameworks by reconstituting the eroded relation between a universalist federalism and a plurality of particularistic communities — the only context within which pluralistic politics and morality can coexist.

6) This political dualism of populist particularity and federalist universality may allow both the defense of particularistic cultures as well as the predominance of a universalist framework preserving fundamental values of rationality and legality. A central bureaucratic apparatus cannot be completely eliminated. But, within such a context, it can be redimensioned

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constitutionally and limited to the safeguarding of the autonomous constituting units, which remain the alpha and omega of the new politics.

This attempt to develop a populist politics is predicated on the fact that, notwithstanding an immense literature on democratic theory, the meaning and practice of democracy remains as confused as it is universally accepted. Today there is very little democratic participation because it has been administratively reduced to simple choices among equally unpalatable alternatives. It is essentially a spectacular kind of activity: a passive experience which leaves those who engage in it the way Adorno said he felt after watching Hollywood movies: stupider than before. In order to develop an institutional context for a really democratic politics involving people at large rather than merely intellectuals and lawyers pretending to represent "virtue, goodness, beauty and the American way," i.e., a populist politics, it is necessary to talk about the preconditions for face-to-face interaction: situations in which politics is not simply a matter of making decisions, but also an educational experience — the constitution of citizenship, concrete individuality, a public sphere. This does not mean politics understood in the sense of an Enlightenment ideology gone mad, an exhaustive politicization of the "private" whereby everything becomes "public," a project impossible in principle, but the establishment of an adequate mode of representation and expression of what is always irreducibly private and its public otherness, which integrates it within the social whole. In the systematically distorting Habermasian terminology: it is not the *colonization* but only the integration of a *Lebenswelt*, which is not obliterated in the process. If this participation is rendered impossible, as it usually is, by technicalities having to do with unmanageable sizes, competence, etc., then it is necessary to foster smaller political units to allow all to participate in various capacities; and to condition identities combining the public and the private. The present separation has made the public sphere the domain of intellectuals and technocrats: New Class ideologues.

What has happened in the US (not unlike what has also happened in other societies) is that the development of spectacular politics, i.e., the reduction of all politics to what can be filtered through the media, has brought about a political closure: it is impossible for individuals with particularistic interests to translate them politically without first redefining them in terms of what the predominant system of representation allows and recognizes. To the extent that this closure shuts out the expression of significant concerns, the latter tend to resurface as social pathologies requiring ever increasing bureaucratic intervention — to the point of overloading the system beyond any possible rational steering. Even those political interests not shut out by the predominant system of representation can only take the form of single-issue politics: social movements. Thus today all meaningful politics tends to take the form of civil disobedience, be it opposition or support for abortion, gay rights, racism, school control, busing, etc. Only by engaging in civil disobedience (after otherwise uneventful "demonstrations" fail to attract media attention) do these various

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movements obtain the kind of public hearing they should receive as a matter of course. The very constitution of opposition as civil disobedience already translates it into the terms of the predominant bureaucratic logic and thus destroys that very particularity it sought to vindicate against the homogenizing technocracy.

The problem with civil disobedience is that it is *exceptional* politics. When it displaces *normal* politics, as it has in the US today, it tends to destroy politics as the arena of collective will formation and identity: there is no longer a clash of political positions nor of interests within a public context but rather a clash of values which present themselves as non-negotiable. When political positions are no longer susceptible to political compromise, legality becomes secondary and the foundation of organized social life is threatened. To the extent that some values become so overwhelming and crucial as to warrant civil disobedience, the legal structure degenerates into a fiction and an obstacle — something which gets in the way of the realization of these values. This is the typical situation Schmitt described as super-legality, understood as the hypostatization of one or more values above and beyond the legal structure. From a constitutive feature of social being, the legal structure becomes merely instrumental, and politics as the locus of collective will formation becomes impossible. Obeying the law or participating in political life becomes a matter of expedience: doing what one can get away with and not get caught, rather than doing what *should* be done. No society can function on this basis.

The generalization of this predicament means social disintegration to the point that it becomes necessary to reconstitute legality on bases other than those associated with the administrative apparatus of a state seen as no longer embodying a general will but as an alien entity opposed to most if not all citizens. That is when populism becomes meaningful as the basis of an alternative. Although severely eroded, residual community values (which continue thriving not only within the seemingly benevolent but highly debilitating context of Western spectacular politics but also, and even more viably, under the brutal repression of Stalinist regimes) can become the source of a new particularistic legality. To the extent that these various communities are particularistic and in conflict with each other, very soon it becomes necessary to figure out a way for them to coexist, cooperate and learn from each other without friction or even, in extreme cases, destruction. This is when populism generalizes itself into federalism, understood as something other than a glorified synonym for statism.

The original notion of federalism as an aggregation of autonomous units within a larger national context has become meaningless. After the Civil War, the federal government instrumentalized provisions for common defense and interstate commerce as a pretext for allowing state penetration into every feature of everyday life. Today in the US there is no part of everyday life that escapes "federal jurisdiction," i.e., that is autonomous from the central state. Worse yet, every political demand is immediately translated into calls for more federal

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intervention, bureaucratic control and federal laws. The Left has been a major accomplice in all this. It no longer relates to real people, the working class, or anybody: it simply addresses Washington in the name of an anonymous, mediatized populace through TV, the newspapers and the demonstrations necessary to attract attention. When it does not feed into this statist logic, it simply deploys super-legality against what it always dismissed anyway as "bourgeois legality." This is a disastrous no-win situation.

To reiterate: this gradual delegitimation of existing legality by the intensification of bureaucratic intervention generating "motorized legislation" (what is lawful today may no longer be so tomorrow and vice-versa) or by deploying super-legality leads increasingly to social disintegration. Eventually, it can be remedied through the only type of reorganization possible: on the basis of ethnic, national, linguistic and/or religious lines, i.e., pre-modern modes of organization, which still manage to mediate a great deal of everyday life beneath the bureaucratic glaze and the modernist veneer.

Luke: Piccone has described the spectacular nature of politics today, emphasizing the ritualized televisual dramas resting at the core of most electoral contests, as well as the turn toward civil disobedience that has taken the place of serious mass politics. The latter, in turn, is often just the province of managerial or professionalized radicals who provide the specialized expertise to articulate, organize, interpret and represent interests to the established power structure. Looking at the prospect of "the possibilities for a new populist and participatory politics," something obviously is standing in its way, i.e., this spectacular, televisual pre-fab quality of contemporary American politics. In addition, however, we also have to consider other substantive problems that Lasch, for example, raises when he talks about how a populist politics would work. One of the interesting things in his analysis is the claim that a populist politics rests ultimately on a decentralized, participatory, and face-to-face system of production. Particularly in the US, the populist movement was the last gasp of a craft-oriented economy. If the vision of a communal, autonomous sort of popular public life Piccone is talking about is to be realized, we will also have to address issues concerning the production technology, social institutions, and social interests which are presently organized bureaucratically, technocratically and professionally.

Clearly, one of the major obstacles to a populist, participatory politics is technology — the way it has been centralized and bureaucratized to produce what everyone needs on the basis of an essentially passive consumer economy. Then there is the question of property — how capital is held collectively and privately, which Lasch also sees as a major concern of a populist politics reacting against a society in which more and more people are becoming wage laborers and salary workers rather than owning and using their own property and capital as independent producers. Accepting these economic forms is what leads to the dependent, passive, spectacular sort of personality that ends up engaging not

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only in a passive form of spectacular politics but also in accepting the essentially passive role of being a consumer in a planned, transnational, corporate economy. This populace has a very mystified notion, if it has any at all, of how technology relates to society or how it delivers the goods and services necessary to sustain public life. In considering whether a new populist or participatory politics is possible, we must look beyond the mass-mediated nature of elections, the mass-mediated nature of interest group politics, and investigate how technology is organized, how property is held, how capital circulates, and how the centralized management of those spheres of public life actually function, in addition to looking at the issues Piccone addressed with regard to today's mass-mediated, televisual political system. The continuing fragmentation of community life today is the direct result of localities *not* questioning or *not* resisting effectively powerful centralizing forces in the corporate and state sectors.

Anderson: When discussing participatory politics and communities in which modern individuals can live, we must confront the fragmentation of everyday life resulting from modernity. The real question is whether the consequences of modernity can be overcome without giving up the emancipation of individuals that modernity also undeniably provides.

In that respect, what we are talking about is finding a compromise between two worlds — the pre-modern and the modern. It is a typically and ironically — for this group of panelists anyway, excluding myself — liberal enterprise. Alternatively, however, this search for the best of two perhaps incompatible worlds is really a matter of wanting our cake and eating it too: family, stability, upward mobility, etc. — also a typically liberal enterprise. I am unabashedly a liberal, but I wonder whether our underlying assumption, that communities can be re-created in which modern individuals can live is not an exercise in liberal hubris.

So there is a troubling question faced by practically any particular community today as a pre-condition to participatory politics, etc. But there is a second form of fragmentation of community that we have not addressed sufficiently. I mean that even if we are successful in the first enterprise, the result may well be that none of these newly reconstituted communities can talk to each other or find common cause in a political discourse. That is assuming conditions within any individual community are such that modern individuals, i.e., individuals who believe among other things that they have certain individual, modernist rights against the collectivity, are not deeply oppressed by their communities. This is not an idle liberal worry; it is happening today in many places worldwide that are newly emancipated. Piccone, in particular, may welcome this fragmentation as the cost of re-invigorating individual communities. I do not.

God help Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union and a dozen other places as their particular communities reinvigorate themselves through war with other communities. To accede to this model of purchasing integrity of any particular community at the price of fragmentation between communities seems

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to me to give up what we first sought, i.e., communities in which modern individuals can live. This result is not that.

Therefore, let us return to what makes us, as individuals, modern. Let us return to that upon which generations of Frankfurt School theorists have heaped scorn. Let us return to the ties that in the modern world truly bind, in order to find a common ground that will temper the allegiance of individuals to their particular communities and give them an interest in preserving life as between their particular communities. I mean, of course, the products of homogenized consumer culture, those items of consumption which standardize individuals and their desires, cut across all ethnicities, religions, tribes, and peoples. I mean in particular, Velveeta cheese, Reebok shoes, microwave ovens, blowdriers, Newsweek, ballpoint pens. Levis, TV soap operas, and rock n' roll music.

In the end, it may be the homogenization of products, markets and consumers that holds the polity together. Anyone who doubts this should consider whether secretly, in his or her heart, there isn't a hope, for example, that a weakness for Western consumer goods, items bearing microchips, will corrupt and finally take the shape of communities of virulent Islamic fundamentalism or of Serbs and Croats. They will become like us and we will live in peace or at least passivity. The liberal fear of war between strong communities is not misplaced, and I put more faith in consumption of standardly desired and produced consumer products to neutralize communitarian strife than in the political culture we have so far imagined it. And I bet, secretly, a lot of you do too. [General uproar among the rest of the panelists]

Luke: Velveeta diet to a Velveeta society, or let them eat Cheez-whiz . . .

Anderson: I believe in Velveeta. I watch television, and it tells me that Velveeta makes the best Cheez-whiz. The second point I want to make is purely technical. There may be lawyers in the audience who are confused by Piccone's use of the term "federalism." Just for the record, it bears no resemblance to the kind of legal debates that have gone on concerning federalism. It is a far more drastic concept closer to discussions going on in Europe now about 1992 than anything related to the question of the division of budgetary authority between the federal government and the states.

The third point is that, in some respects, we are starting out on the wrong foot. I am not sure it makes sense to consider the question of a new politics and a new federalism without first considering what kinds of communities they are designed to serve. Taves raised this question in his introductory remarks. One thing is clear: there is no political fix here. No one can claim that we just introduce certain federalist changes and that these would trickle down to provide the conditions for creating more or better or truer communities. It should go the other way — by first creating the conditions for community and then seeng what kind of political arrangements are needed. This would require what has been described here as "populism," although I would want to

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see some commonality among these recreated communities, and homogenized consumer culture seems to be the best we can do . At any rate, one cannot start from the top and say that tinkering with political arrangements will produce "community."

Berman: Contemporary American political culture is marked by an existential tension between an individual sense of disaffection, generalized because everyone shares in it (the *de facto* negation of community), and a general disenfranchisement, since no one feels empowered to change the given. Everything appears to be going wrong, and there is nothing anyone can do about it. A Tocquevillean logic of democracy culminates in atomized individualism, cultural conformism, and cynical disaffection from decision-making processes. The massive funding that politicians have to invest in media campaigns is only the crudest indication of the magnitude of the apathy that has to be overcome to mobilize citizens to engage in electoral rituals increasingly perceived to be perfunctory. That apathy, moreover, is probably a reasonable response to the sort of vacuous alternatives put on display in the op-ed pages of our "public sphere" — a tweedledum-tweedledee duet of state and market. The statist solutions are, of course, grouped around the Democratic Party, whose difference from the Republican Party has dwindled to little more than haggling: it wanted the Gulf War, but just a little bit slower, and it wants the bureaucracy, but at a slightly higher price. The Left, having abandonned most of its former radicalism and any claims to represent a qualitatively new program, has fallen back on its own statist genealogy and become only a sectarian faction of the Democrats. All residues of the New Left critique of the welfare state have been purged, leaving only a training ground for party functionaries.

The market solution, on the other hand, splits immediately into the high church of the supply-siders and the low church of libertarianism. Yet while both rail against the state, they never want to abolish it, since the market has always depended on the state to maintain the preconditions of its existence: the bureaucratic expansion of corporate capitalism is nowhere genuinely threatened by the state. On the contrary, as every scandal regarding government funding amply demonstrates, the smooth functioning of corporate capitalism presupposes an equally strong state. The interesting point is that in the past two decades all representative figures of established politics, statists and marketeers alike, run rhetorically against the government, as if the government opposed itself (but, again, did nothing about it). For reasons of self-legitimation, the state must appeal to a widespread anti-statist sentiment in the populace (which is, however, not therefore simply pro-market) in order to co-opt, colonize and redirect it in ways amenable to state manipulation. When the Left talks about community, it generally means more state intervention and state funding; when the state talks about community, it only wants to cut funding without empowering communities. While the Left and the Right, the state and the market, always reduce political life to one or the other (and the

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one always implies the other, two halves which do not add up to a whole), a third alternative, beyond the fixation on state and market, is encoded in the program for populism.

Yet the problem with populism is that one is afraid of it, for, during the past century, it has been consistently denounced as reactionary, know-nothing, crude, vulgar, and, horror of horrors, lower middle class (Marx' idiocy of rural life transplanted to the cities). Now, it may well be that populism has been historically accompanied by some obnoxious political values, such as racism or anti-intellectualism, which should be neither denied nor condoned. However, one can certainly challenge the allegations that these retrograde aspects have been central to the populist project (Lawrence Goodwyn's work has effectively discredited the virulent anti-populism of a Richard Hofstadter on this score). Similarly, it is doubtful that the presence of racism or anti-intellectualism within populism substantively distinguishes populism from its political competitors — establishment conservatism or progressive liberalism — neither of which has a particularly clean record on either point.

Anderson is right in arguing that to rethink populism today entails inquiring into the viability of communities, despite the logic of atomistic individualism, consumerist conformism, and political apathy. Do communitarian relations somehow thrive despite the processes of homogenization (that Anderson applauds) and the spectacularity (that Piccone denounces)? Despite the sorts of assumptions we may have imbibed from the cultural pessimism of sociology, it is probably not the case that lived experience has been reduced to the commodified forms of career, consumption, and clientelism. On the contrary, a heterogeneous mixture of other loyalties — friendships, families, neighborhoods, crafts, local identities — make up the stuff of an alternative intersubjectivity: a degraded intersubjectivity, to be sure, since it is consistently denied hegemonic representation. A populist politics would have to proceed through a revaluation of these dimensions of social experience and a concomitant deflation of the status of abstract individuality, which is why it represents a threat to both corporate capitalism and the welfare state. It would imply an inversion of the existing distribution of power through a privileging of local structures: "grassroots politics" not as an instrument to lobby for more state intervention but as an end in itself that would necessitate a radical shrinking of the central state apparatus. A thought experiment: what if one imagined a reorganization of the tax structure, whereby the percentage of revenue wasted on the federal government went to local units, and the relatively small percentage now reserved for cities went to the central authority? It might lead to a less imperial federal center, presumably not all that bad. It might lead to the possibility of providing services on a local level hardly thinkable in the current situation. It might initiate a process whereby local communities could determine their agendas and priorities and, consequently, a reinvigoration of political responsibility.

Now we can see why Anderson's appeal to consumer homogenization as the guarantor of community is off the mark. Homogenization: Anderson confuses

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uniformity with community, whereby community is necessarily always the locus of plurality, difference, and conflict (which is why it is such a likely candidate for genuine political life). Community is not adherence to an unquestioned credo, just as *Gemeinschaft* is not *Gleichschaltung*; there is nothing less communitarian than fascism. Nor is community a vehicle for a "consensus" understood as a vessel of "truth." Instead, it implies the possibility of non-mediatized, non-spectacular political interactions, allowing for shifting constellations capable of coming to tentative decisions that have validity because the process has been participatory. In fact, the liberal preference for consumerist homogenization turns out to be a strategy to repress and, effectively, outlaw the sorts of differences that have material existence in lived experience and which could find expression in the communitarian forum of populism. Therefore, contrary to the claims of sociology, liberal modernism, which generates conformism, is more repressive and intolerant of difference than the putatively reactionary modalities of community.

If community is not a matter of homogenization, neither is it compatible with a primary reliance on consuming, understood as the passive receptivity of the hegemonic values of wealth. Community is the locus of a constant interaction, renegotiation, and transformation, not the conformism of Anderson's Reeboks. I suspect that Piccone will have more to say on this point, but I want to point out an odd conceptual proximity between Anderson's faith in consumerism and Piccone's critique of the spectacle. While the consequences they have drawn from their presumptions are very different, both imply that the commodity form has eradicated other modes of social experience: for Piccone, regrettably; for Anderson, thankfully. To consider populism and its precondition, community, a plausible agenda today means, however, recovering dimensions of existence that have not been subsumed by the commodity form and its display. It means developing a phenomenological account that can explain the survival of intersubjectivity, creativity, and the capacity of experience despite the onslaught of the culture industry. And, of course, it means jettisoning a good deal of the self-appointed radical criticism of the academy, the situationist epigones, the Baudrillard anthologizers, the discourse disciplinarians, and recognizing them for what they are: the affirmative ideologues of the New Class of an administered society which, as Piccone has explained, has already begun to dismantle itself, even if its conservative thinkers have not figured it out yet. The linguistic turn in cultural theory with all its variants — semiotics, communicative action, deconstruction, etc. — is just the expression of those groups who have a particularly developed control over language within the structure of an information society and who therefore have a vested interest in denigrating non-linguistic components of social experience. Trapped within their prisonhouse of signs, they cannot see beyond language. The populist recovery of community recognizes that people who speak may also live.

Telos: Would anyone care to respond?

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Anderson: Yes, to make a point of clarification. I spoke of peace *between* communities, not of what *constitutes* community in particular instances.

Piccone: We should elaborate on some of the issues that have come up. Luke has rightly pointed out the one-sided character of the discussion so far: we have focused exclusively on populist politics at the expense of other equally important areas such as the economy, technology, property relations, etc. If we take seriously the hypothesis that populism is not merely a political ideal, a vision of how we wish to see modern society reorganized that is not only possible and viable but probably a necessary solution to the present crisis both from the viewpoint of critics as well as defenders of the existing power structure, then we should try to identify the ways in which the same managerial logic — the same Enlightenment ideology-New Class project that has brought about this political crisis — is also operative in other areas such as technology, the economy, property relations, etc.

Consider the question of technology, how it has developed within the "totally administered society," and how it is in fact changing along lines which could be described as populist, i.e., in Lasch's sense that populism rotates around crafts and otherwise small autonomous producers. For decades the conventional managerial wisdom has been that the wave of the future was increasing centralization, ever larger factories and further Taylorization. Years ago, when *Telos* was still embroiled in the project of resurrection/reburial of Western Marxism, we discussed the political nature of the technological rationalization strategy built into the New Deal project (in connection with the critical reception of the work of Tronti and other Italian communist theoreticians who eventually flipped out with *Potere Operaio*, then the Red Brigades, only to eventually, sheepishly find their way back into the folds of a decrepit Communist Party now ashamed even to call itself that any more). Thanks to the work of Sabel and Piore, as well as other people who have been discussing the development of post-Fordism, it is becoming generally accepted (again, contrary to the claims of that same managerial ideology and the predominant Marxist mythology understood as an extreme version of it) that those "rationalizations" undertaken in the 1920s and 1930s had less to do with economies of scale than with the political imperatives of capital under attack from a still generally skilled and increasingly politicized working class. Unless deskilled and robotized by industrial rationalization, and otherwise cretinized by the culture industry, this working class, organized primarily as the AFL (in contraposition to the homogenized government-and-communist-supported CIO) could have resulted in democratization of the workplace or at least its restructuring along lines more conducive to the nurturing of crafts and small autonomous producers, and thereby become anathema to massive concentrations of capital and power.

Even in the worst possible case, the successful reduction of living workers to Gramsci's "trained gorillas" would never have succeeded in guaranteeing industrial peace and what Harry Braverman has so aptly described as the degradation

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of labor (precisely for the reasons Gramsci listed in his almost universally misunderstood essay on "Americanism and Fordism") had it not been for the simultaneous development of the culture industry, the economic boom brought about by WWII and the subsequent military Keynesianism, and the sectoral high standards of living brought about by uneven development. The point is that the rationality crisis engulfing the political order has its isomorphic counterpart within technology and industry. Thus they are also equally amenable to a populist reorganization — a reorganization which, once again, is not a mere ideal but something necessitated by the very nature of the crisis. Despite the centrality of large multinationals such as IBM, AT&T, etc. in the most advanced areas of high-tech, the secret of the success of Silicon Valley and its clones springing up throughout the US is that a bunch of engineers, technicians and scientists think up new ideas, develop them as far as they can, and then look forward to financial Nirvana when they will be bought out by the giants in the field.

The point is that much of the dynamism that these high-tech industries still exhibit is largely a function of a residual but now once again growing craftsmanship thriving beneath increasingly ossifying and unwieldy corporate superstructures — industrial dinosaurs which manage to survive mostly by successfully coopting new modes of craftsmanship. The now universally recognized crisis of bureaucratic involution is not limited to the public sector, but has long since permeated every large corporation. Ford Motor Company almost went under in the waning days of Henry Ford because of his unwillingness not only to deal with organized labor (as it turned out, not a stupid idea after all) but also to decentralize (federalize) and restore rational accountability and efficiency — the sort of reforms introduced by Sloan in GM and which, in some form or other, became widespread within almost every large corporation confronted with similar problems. It is ironic today to watch in the new TV ads for the latest lemon dished out by the GM automotive bureaucracy (the Saturn), the celebration of an idyllic reconstitution of precisely that Middletown communitarian milieu the Lynds described in the 1920s as being destroyed by these same economic powers. This is not happening because of corporate nostalgia or any sudden rediscovery of morality, responsibility or civic duty by American auto-makers, but because Detroit, and all the industrial nightmares it stands for, does not and *cannot* work. GM needs to deploy Middletown, or what is left of it, to meet the Japanese challenge — a challenge successful so far only to the extent that it has been parasitic on the American technological locomotive and able to avoid "detroitification" only because of an intricate idiosyncratic policy of paternalistic and corporatist industrial relations embodying some of the more positive features of communitarianism.

As for the economy and property relations in general, the situation is not all that different. One of the more long-lasting injuries inflicted by Marxism on the conventional wisdom of both the traditional Left and the conservative Right has been an understanding of capital as an abstraction operating on the basis of

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a hyper-rationality which respects nothing and no one in its obsession with accumulation and profits. In fact, behind every chunk of capital there is a fallible human being who is becoming increasingly suspicious of the bureaucratic management of financial markets by the people who have brought about the S & L crisis, degraded the American economy from the strongest in the world to one increasingly dependent of foreign investments, and turned the US from the world's leading creditor into its leading debtor nation. The separation of capital and management, universally hailed as the most successful advance in capitalism since the invention of paper money, no longer seems so brilliant. The junk bond debacle and the rest of the mergers and acquisition chicanery typical of the 1980s have destroyed many more fortunes than they created. This is clearly an area that would require an elaborate discussion in its own right. In the present context, it only needs to be pointed out that the bureaucratization of capital has resulted in the exact same problem that bureaucratization has generated everywhere else: inefficiency, waste and counterproductivity.

At any rate, communities with sufficient political will can readily control capital by means of taxation, regulations, etc. Only paranoid Marxists who believe in the omnipotence and omniscience of capital still believe that economic power can always automatically translate into political power. Any careful scrutiny of how capitalists actually transact everyday business reveals the extent to which they are hemmed in by the state and by political relations they constantly try to control, but not always or often very successfully. No matter how transnational capital may become, it always needs to be grounded somewhere, and its penetration anywhere is always a function of the complicity of those who subsequently become its victims. There is no reason why a populist polity should not, in principle, be able to control its economic life without necessarily planning everything or even becoming in any way "socialist," i.e., necessarily succumbing once again to the domination and management of a New Class bureaucracy.

As for Anderson's comments, I am appalled that he can push Reebok shoes and Velveeta cheese as universalizing agencies of emancipation. Aside from the fact that I and most of my friends and relatives have never worn Reebok shoes, and probably never will (in fact, the only people that seem to wear them are either fashionable yuppies or ghetto dwellers too shell-shocked by the culture industry to know any better), the assumption that the only way to attain some minimal commonality allowing us to live together is through consumerist homogenization and cretinization is simply absurd. No, that does not seem to me to be at all a terrific idea. In fact, it strikes me as incredibly stupid and conformist. The only reason I have trouble automatically blasting it out of the water is precisely because of its immediately obvious absurdity, i.e., the fact that, because of its obviousness, we have not had to discuss it for years.

Be that as it may, let me remind comrade Anderson about what is wrong with consumerism as the new social glue substituting for fundamental spiritual values — besides running counter to all that Western civilization stands for,

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i.e., a new kind of individuality, by reducing people to passive consumers manipulable by a productive system whose implicit teleology reduces to growth for its own sake. In order to convince otherwise rational individuals to shell out more than a C-note for silly looking footwear not qualitatively better than old-fashioned canvas sneakers requires the preliminary reduction of individuality to a sub-individuality characterized by the inability to relate needs and satisfactions without the external mediation of a culture industry instrumentalized by footwear companies and subliminally suggesting, through advertisement, that wearing Reebok shoes means more than simply not going bare-foot but achieving virility, athletic prowess and the kind of *Mündigkeit* no longer automatically attainable through the ordinary process of growing up.

A massive Freudian, neo-Freudian and non-Freudian socio-psychological literature already exists documenting how the reduction of "bourgeois individuality" to the sort of sub-individuality and "authoritarian personality" amenable to bureaucratic manipulation (or, in more extreme cases, attracted to charismatic movements) is made possible by capitalist epiphenomena such as the obliteration of the authority figure within the family and his substitution by a bureaucratic apparatus or a "great leader." This is the root cause of catastrophic events such as the Holocaust, the ecological crisis, and the kind of social disintegration that makes it extremely difficult to reconstitute communities into anything allowing meaningful social existence. We cannot be personally blamed for the Holocaust or for the depletion of the ozone layer, but it seems almost criminal to advocate, as emancipatory and as a precondition for the reconstitution of communities, the perpetuation of precisely what is largely responsible for their disintegration in the first place. Anderson pretends to be a "liberal" — although it is not immediately clear what that means beside providing a smokescreen of open-mindedness, tolerance and elitist pseudo-compassion for the rest of the stiffs not able to participate in yuppiedom. Thus it is not surprising that he also buys into the kind of ideology that the New Deal put forth as part of the strategy of Americanization meant to constitute a new national community by neutralizing all fundamental values under a thick sauce of consumerism. But he also knows that the result of that strategy has been community fragmentation, social disintegration, and a long series of unintended consequences (homelessness, widespread drug-addiction, general institutional collapse, etc.), which the kind of populism we are discussing, properly redefined in terms of a strong but minimalist federalist framework, is meant to remedy. So much for Reebok shoes, Velveeta cheese and liberal chewing gum. Anderson fails to realize that the kind of shallow consumerism he advocates tends to erode all values, especially religious ones. *Caveat emptor*: future generations of Andersons, brought up on Velveeta cheese and running around in Reebok shoes, are much more likely to puff controlled substances than attend church regularly.

As for the question of federalism, Anderson is right when he objects that the federalism we are discussing has absolutely nothing to do with the kind of

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debates going on in *The New Republic* or *The Nation*. That kind of federalism has simply become a synonym for statism with a human face: statism American-style. This does not mean, however, that we are misusing the term. Rather, it is the other way around. Federalism has a long history and only recently has it been turned into the interventionist travesty that Anderson and other liberals with relatively short historical attention spans accept as normal. When we speak of federalism, we mean the pre-Civil War type of federalism, the Swiss model, or even the kind of political structures that developed in the 12th, 13th, and 14th centuries when it became necessary to redefine relations between a weakening imperial center and the increasingly strong units constituting the Empire — structures which, given the previous millennia of European history, came to be modeled on the remnants of Roman law and the relatively sophisticated legal arrangements developed to run the Empire.

Since we are not politicians involved in resource allocation or taxation policies, it is not unwarranted for us to take a more theoretical approach and to rethink what happened to the notion of federalism over the past two centuries, or what consequences have followed with every shift. Our concern with federalism has primarily to do with the search for a long term political restructuring in the wake of the collapse of managerial ideology, of the central plan and, more broadly, of the utopia of a totally administered society.

One final remark about the spectacular politics that Berman assumes I endorse in the way it was developed by Guy Debord and the situationists a couple of decades ago. In line with our recent discussions ("The Society of the Spectacle 20 Years Later," in *Telos* 86 [Winter 1990-91], pp. 81-102), I only use the term "spectacular politics" to describe how the system tries to function. To use once again the old Marxist lingo: it is the "objective" side of a political system which, however, occludes the more important "subjective" side — the domain within which a populist politics may thrive. The working hypothesis is that, as long as the system can make the spectacle viable by managing effectively whatever crisis develops, the resulting "subjective" resentment, alienation and dissatisfaction will remain submerged. Since, for reasons already mentioned, the motivational, rationality and even ecological crises which necessarily develop within such a system cannot be managed indefinitely without redeploying the previously manipulated and marginalized "subjective" side. Sooner or later it becomes necessary to reactivate that side in order to even continue the manipulation and marginalization. That is the populist moment. This may sound too close to the old *Zusammenbruchstheorie* for comfort, but I hope no one will recycle the equally old standard accusations of determinism and mechanistic thinking.

Luke: I agree with Berman. What we are trying to do in *Telos* is to come up with an alternative to reified public choices that occur between statist and market solutions, which can be associated with the populist tradition. My inclination is to leave notions such as state vs. market just as they are, because far too

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many people believe they are an obvious opposition in terms of what they say in editorials or op-eds. All-too-often the "market solution" is just a place-holding term for technocratic elitism or corporate administration being given free reign. By the same token, statism, which often conjures up an image of a number of bureaucrats forcibly imposing their own rules on society, is partly correct, but it often includes an influence market or a bidding game or a lobbying exchange. The conventional constructions of the state and of various ideologies or partisan loyalties such as "Left or "Right," "Democratic" or "Republican," are highly problematic. If we start pushing toward this third term — populism, communitarianism or whatever — we may begin to remove some of the residues that have settled on these terms. Indeed, we may discover that a communitiarian, populist sort of society would have many more of the attributes of a libertarian, market exchange system based on face-to-face, personal relations than any sort of centralized state-based organization. It would rely more on small platoons of local intermediary groups instead of huge armies of centralized bureaucracies. By the same token, it would not be a stateless society. Rather, a populist order would be a system in which many of the functions assigned to bureaucrats within the state or left open to bidding exchanges in terms of lobbying groups would have to be reappropriated by a more activist, communal set of structures based on localistic face-to-face relations. This is a much more useful path to follow.

Anderson: I want to take Piccone on directly, because I think he has become enamored with federalism as a nostalgic ideal, and even with the kind of political fix I mentioned earlier. The assumption that everyone forms these communities and lives in federated bliss is utter nonsense. When some kind of commonality is lacking between these communities, then maybe homogenized consumer culture can help in filling the gap. Or maybe that task can be fulfilled by shared spiritual values. But the idea that strong communities can live together without problems (violence, for example) in some federated state has not been historically the case. The usual result is either civil war, where these communities fight each other because they do not share common values, or they wind up holding slaves, burning witches, or doing equally reprehensible things. So I do not see how federalism can help here. I think we are searching for a pipedream.

Berman: While Anderson is correct to admonish us not to grow too sanguine regarding the likely political ramifications of communitarianism, he is wrong when, making a characteristically liberal-modernist move, he implies that community necessarily implies a propensity for atrocities. Two rebuttals are in order. First, without exculpating all communitarian structures, one can certainly point out some of the many instances where it was by no means populist communitarianism but liberal progressivism that led to massacres: the expansionist settlement of the American West or imperialism in Vietnam. Even where a regionalist

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rhetoric was occasionally deployed, as in National Socialism, the real political history was hardly one of a genuinely federalist decentralization but rather a matter of a rapid concentration of power in the center. It is simply not the case that a centralization of political power — trust the "federal" government — combined with expansive consumerist culture is a likely agenda to improve on the alleged backwardness of local communities. Secondly, in realistic terms, these local communities are likely to appear less than ideal, both to outside observers (who nevertheless ought to be cautious before invoking outside intervention as a panacea) and to some internal participants (who, if the community were empowered as a genuine locus of power, could engage in political conflict within an immediate context). Populism does not mean a celebration of the *status quo* of every local structure; on the contrary, that is one version of conservatism. Populism means, instead, recognizing the primacy of the local field in the resolution of conflict and, as a corollary, a reduction (but not necessarily a full elimination) of the role of centralist regulation. To take as a concrete example the history of civil rights and race relations, arguably liberalism's central case for a strong interventionist state: one need be neither a black nationalist nor a southern conservative to note the ambiguous consequences of a history in which a popular movement, growing out of black churches and other local institutions, was transformed into a media spectacle and, therefore, had to watch its agenda shifted into the distant arenas of the Supreme Court and the Congress where it found a legalistic rather than a local-political solution (a solution which, to say the least, has had less than satisfactory results for the bulk of its presumed beneficiaries).

Piccone has now made a strong case for decentralizing tendencies within the framework of post-Fordism, implying that populist communitarianism is not merely a utopian *desideratum* but a real potential within the development of contemporary society. Yet the models of political organization he cites — pre-Civil War federalism and medieval Europe — tend to be archaic. He seems to assume that modern technology precludes communities, since these can only include rural villagers riding happy donkeys. What about communities without donkeys? The challenge then is to articulate a concrete political theory, particularly with regard to a transformed relation between local community and federal center. Some of Anderson's anxieties regarding the likelihood of local barbarism might be addressed if we recall that this process is not taking place in the abstract but in the historical context of considerable centralization and uniformity. The administrative state is not going to collapse overnight; through the past century, it has set up an extensive network of control, interlocking technologies, a mobile population, and trans-regional norms. The suggestion is that this bureaucratic constellation has ceased to be productive and has begun to cause more problems than it solves; hence the possibility — not the necessity — of shifting political organization toward greater local empowerment. Why the Left should be fearful of this sort of development is unclear, unless it is prepared to admit that it trusts the state more than communities.

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Taves: We should now move on to the second theme of our discussion. Is it possible to reconstitute truly constitutive communities within which a modern individual can live? If the respondents do not get around to discuss that, I would like to explore how it is that some of us, raised in the age of homogenization, might live with notions of more locally controlled communities and what kind of new federalism is required for that development to occur.

Anderson: After playing the liberal to Piccone's federalism for the past few minutes, let me back up and try to see what we mean when we discuss "constitutive communities." It is a term that has been developed over the past few years in our discussions. The pure communitarian ideal has to do with relations between individuals that are closest to family, village, religion and tribe: those premodern categories one is stuck with at birth. These features, in their positive aspect, provide people with some totalizing framework within which they live their lives. I believe this framework must ultimately go beyond the mere facts of birth to something spiritual or transcendental. Perhaps in premodern society it was enough that one was a Serb or a Celt or whatever, but we moderns need something more universal.

Consider the phenomenon of the return of the baby-boom generation to church. That very phenomenon points to the difference between "constitutive communities" and "voluntary associations." On the one hand, there are people longing for meaning in their lives. That has to do with children and mortality. People are concerned with the transmission of values and things that are important to them as they grow older, and those do not take place at the level of single individuals. In that respect, they are looking for "constitutive communities" because, although other kinds of voluntary associations are enormously important, they are not the sort of totalizing, spiritual communities that give meaning to life. Voluntary associations are tacitly or implicitly contractual, and make life easier, but they do not give it fundamental meaning. Some people, of course, confuse the two: they return to church not in order to find meaning but to make their lives easier by importing the meaning of life into their associations. A typically Yuppie move!

Now the question is: is it possible to come up with some kind of constitutive communities that provide *some* of those values while at the same time avoiding the disasters associated with them, such as the burning of witches. I do not think it is an adequate response from Berman to say that modern societies have also engaged in atrocities. One has to worry about what these communities can do to individuals inside them. Then there is the question of whether an attempt to construct a form of community which is not constitutive in this strict sense turns out to be yet another method of upward mobility. There are two key features of constitutive life that have to be carried over to modern social formations. One is limitations on geographical movement. As long as people move as often as they do now, there is no chance for community to develop. The other is that most constitutive communities are based on

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some transcendental element: they are not contractual and they are not sought after for the sake of self-interest or even mutual benefit. Rather, they are sought after for their own sake and, more likely, for the sake of God. In the society of God, Reeboks will have a place, but a limited one. Those are the two features we have to look for in new constitutive communities today.

Luke: I have not been around New York to participate in these discussions about constitutive community, so I am a little troubled by this turn in the debate. The sort of constitutive community I have in mind would not necessarily be grounded exclusively in family, religion or tribe. All are very problematic when taken on their own terms. Constitutive communities need not be necessarily transcendental, and I am not sure we are all getting back to them just because we are having children or facing the prospect of dying. I think we are getting back to them because things as they are organized today do not work. The solution has to be found in the reorganization of everyday life. A truly constitutive community for a modern individual would provide answers to major questions about reorganizing the way technology is used, property is shared, capital is handled, society is structured. None of us can talk about or should even worry about trying to provide guarantees of the transcendental element in people's lives. Whether one is talking about witch-burning or trying to find spiritual salvation in the advanced societies, when radical intellectuals start talking about transcendental promises and their "potential benefits" everyone should start running for the doors.

Piccone's problem with the present organization of power is simple: he challenges the planned usurpation or unintended assumption of authority by the American government. In the US what was to have been a federal union has turned into a unitary one where power is both centralized in Washington and not articulated very well. We do not really have a working federalism or a strong confederation of small states where power is shared at the local level on a face-to-face communitarian basis. A confederation which might be constructed on this basis would ideally involve some balance between a centralized unitary system and a confederal, communitarian one, but it would not necessarily get into an artificial legalistic construction of federalism that Anderson seems to be slipping back into: "Because we are not all lawyers, we cannot understand it." This is silly. Actually, we can discuss it and see why it operates so poorly as a system of power.

Berman: A central problem in developing an adequate theory of community is that social theory for quite some time has operated with paradigms that suggest that community belongs irretrievably to the past. Community, so it is alleged, has been replaced by modern forms of society that are, by definition, post-communitarian: from *Gemeinschaft* to *Gesellschaft*. The rhetorical consequence is to render community necessarily archaic and, by extension, communitarians reactionary (hence the liberal modernist equation of populism with retrograde

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politics). The question of a possible survival of communitarian elements, in particular, a non-atavistic survival of community, is blocked from the start by the very structure of the discussion.

One need not deny that social relations have changed enormously in the course of modernization in order to look with skepticism at this occlusion of communitarian aspects of social life. One is forced to wonder if the disappearance of communitarianism is less a function of social processes than of their sociological descriptions. That is, the sociological narratives asserting the demise of *Gemeinschaft* may have had less to do with "objective truth" than with the particular agendas of sociologists propounding the claim. Certainly Max Weber, for example, with his well-known commitment to the construction of a strong national and centralized state, and its concomitant administrative bureaucracy, had little reason to explore the potential for regional control or populist autonomy in Wilhelmine Germany; hence his attacks on the communitarian Left.

If, then, the sociological insistence on the obsolescence of community is an ideological effect of a bureaucratic New Class eager to empower the state, the archaicizing imagery that surrounds discussions of community needs to be revised: *vide* Anderson's visions of witch-burning or even Piccone's appeals to medieval political organization. The problem then becomes to construct a theory of community adequate to 20th century modes of social life in which, for example, the territorial component would not be based on the model of a rural village and the biological component on "standard" — whatever that means — family structures. As has already been argued, the modern social forms of bureaucracy, commodity, and alienation have presumably not occupied all modes of human experience. These still maintain, in a degraded form, elements of other loyalties and interactions, the fragments of communitarian structures which it would be the goal of contemporary Critical Theory to rethink and reconstruct.

Some of these elements include effects of solidarity and charity, historically relegated to the sphere of religion and transcendental values. To what extent does a theory of community imply a revaluation of religion? Yet here too there is no reason to engage in the conservative version of the material and to argue for a reactionary return to orthodox religious forms solely for the sake of orthodoxy. The point is not to pass judgment on particular values and beliefs but to inquire into the manner in which sharing beliefs may well be constitutive of some communities. Would such a stance lead immediately to an uncritical relativism, an archipelago of various communities that cannot communicate with each other? Hardly, as long as the central features of communitarian structure are taken seriously: internal plurality and an external refusal of universalization. Community necessarily implies the participation of more than one individual and, hence, a composition that is heterogeneous (although not infinitely so). It implies the recognized presence of other communities as alternative modalities of social existence. Both aspects imply that community can function as an enabling vehicle for difference (rather than the homogenizing uniformity of bureaucracy and consumerism). When anti-communitarians point to intolerance or

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expansionism as arguments against the viability of communities, what they are identifying is not the communitarian substance itself but its collapse.

Piccone: A lot of issues have been raised, and it may not be possible to deal with all of them satisfactorily. However, it should be emphasized that one of the main reasons why populism has received such "bad press" may have to do with the fact that it is always New Class ideologists who write about it. From a populist viewpoint, things may look rather different. To exemplify this state of affairs, let us briefly look at Anderson's characterization of two fundamentally different types of communities — an excellent instance of how New Class definitions of a reality tend *a priori* to rule out possibilities otherwise immediately obvious from a populist perspective.

In our earlier discussion of communities, which Anderson has pretty well summarized, it became clear that it is possible to divide them into two main categories: voluntary associations understood as aggregations of people concerned with limited particularistic objectives, and constitutive communities understood as the general social context of identity formation, involving kinship, religion, nationality, race, etc. On closer analysis, it turns out that voluntary associations such as the PTA, political groups or social clubs, although performing important functions affecting the lives of those participating in them, simply do not cut it as "communities" in the more fundamental sense. To use a familiar Marxist metaphor: they represent the configuration that communities take when they fall within the logic of the commodity. In a nutshell, voluntary associations are nothing but commodified communities.

Anderson's claim that these are the only communities possible today, which explains his otherwise outrageous proposal that we rebuild communities on the basis of Reebok shoes or Velveeta cheese, simply reflects the closure of the theoretical imagination that results when New Class ideology is swallowed lock, stock and barrel. The present becomes the measure of a past considered irredeemable and irretrievable or of a future conceivable only as a mechanical extension of the present.

To the extent that we all have biological parents, are born and socialized in a particular place, and end up stuck with both natural and social attributes, we are always part of constitutive communities — even when they become disintegrated into meaninglessness. They remain as horizons against which we are who we are. Voluntary associations can never displace them. The only meaningful question is how to reconstitute them so that their disintegration will not cause as much suffering and misery as it presently does. It is the old question of "abstract individualism" so bitterly contested not only by populists but by all serious oppositions during the past couple of centuries — from the anarchists to the Marxists. The problem is what Berman graphically captures in his call for an elaboration of "post-donkey communities," i.e., the need to move beyond talking about communities nostalgically as idealized pre-modern formations which, as such, cannot survive Anderson's Reebokification and,

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ipso facto, capitulation to New Class ideology and domination. I take this to mean that we stop contraposing long-gone archaic communities characterized by the ubiquitous donkey — the idyllic communities described by Lukács in the opening pages of his *Theory of the Novel* — to post-modern societies full of jogging yuppies with headphones, computer terminals everywhere, and Flash Gordon keeping law and order.

Thanks to sociology, that massive codification of New Class ideology, we have come to see communities as mummified entities, nailed once and for all in our collective unconscious by traditions and customs: homogeneous formations predicated on superstition and myth. Allegedly, progress comes and wipes them all out — together with all their irrational hierarchies, traditional injustices and repressive residues. And what replaces them? A "rational" society based on market relations, contractual obligations and a bunch of rights homogenizing all of us against . . . what? An increasingly powerful state no more rational, just and trustworthy than what it originally displaced! Within such a context all transcendental values fall by the wayside, in favor of a liberal predicament: a situation of relativism and abstract individualism fine-tuned by scientifically-minded technocrats — the kind of society depicted by the mass media in the 1950s and 1960s as the all-American ideal. But, lo and behold! a couple of decades later we have a crime-ridden society, full of homeless human wrecks and drug addicts, which no bureaucrat in his right mind thinks he can effectively manage. Suddenly, contrary to conventional New Class wisdom, what seems to keep things together are precisely those few "pre-modern" residues not yet rationalized out of existence.

Contrary to sociology and other New Class ideologies, all communities, no matter how many donkeys they may or may not have in their midst, are extremely dynamic formations always confronting unprecedented developments, adjusting accordingly, absorbing otherness and dealing effectively with foreign elements and new conditions. Only very rarely, in situations in which conditions remain amazingly stable, do communities remain unchanged. I am thinking here about some special cases in the Amazons and other equally remote places, where our anthropologist comrades have discovered some stone age tribes that have managed miraculously to survive unchanged, doing the same thing day in and day out. These are the rare exceptions. The more typical cases are those in which, especially in the case of the European experience (but also in the Eastern civilizations that Hegel, whose anthropological prowess was somewhat questionable, described as frozen in time) there has been interaction between heterogeneous communities and the result has not always invariably been simply a slaughter or enslavement of the "infidels," the pagans, or simply the "natives." There has been assimilation, integration and internalization.

In fact, if we are to make sense of what Western civilization really means, beyond all the recent academically fashionable nonsense about "Eurocentrism" and "multiculturalism," it boils down to precisely this: a development, through struggles and integrations of this type, among a variety of different

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communities, allowing them to live together and, in so doing, to form a new type of humanity truly aspiring to universality. So, I am no longer convinced that today we are in the age of Flash Gordon, where there are (or, at least, should not be) any irrational "pre-modern" communities — that the spread of abstract individualism, Velveeta Cheese, Reeboks, etc. is inevitable and irreversible. Rather, given the rapid pace of change, we find ourselves in a situation in which communities are disintegrating and reintegrating at a much faster rate than has heretofore been the case. Given that there are people like Anderson, who move several times a year and are proud of it, communities have to be constituted and reconstituted at a much faster rate. Consequently, their members live much more precariously than they did in the past, risking, in the process, falling through the community safety-net into homelessness, drugs, crime, etc. In fact, things change so fast that it is almost impossible for us to understand what is happening to us. Yet people do manage to live their lives in most places (with the possible exception of Manhattan) and to have kids and to die and get buried. So to accept the standard accounts of modernity and communities is to succumb to New Class ideology and the kind of spectacular politics and ideology Berman attacked.

Beneath the veneer of progress, of abstract individualism, etc., concrete community relations still thrive — no matter how archaic, irrational and intolerable they may seem from the viewpoint of the New Class — and without them society could not possibly reproduce itself. These are the relations populists have historically defended, even when it happened to involve highly problematic features such as anti-intellectualism, racism, anti-Semitism, etc. The point, then, is to figure out what these processes and mechanisms are and try to rearticulate them in a way that allows them to thrive rather than be destroyed or "rationalized" out of existence. We need to develop a politics appropriate to the task, i.e., a populist politics.

Taves: After having had some experience living outside Manhattan and New York City, I can attest to the fact that communities do exist out there and they are, as Berman said, thriving, even in a very traditional communitarian political sense, despite the homogenizing tendencies of consumption. However, Berman raised the issue of economics, of local control over politics, and it has been my experience that many people involved in real, active local political issues, very local and immediate issues, perceive their job in the last few years as near impossible because of mandates imposed upon them by higher levels of government to meet certain standards of services. In the last discussion the question was raised about how we manage the economy of local communities. But there are two things I think both the liberal wing of the Democratic Party and whatever is left of the Left would object to or worry about. One is what to do about the protection of individual rights. It is nice to say that, on the one hand, communities often promote plurality, but, on the other, often they do not. There are silly cases that illustrate the point. In Texas now there is a

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youngster who is being educated in isolation because he refuses to cut his hair, and that has been used in the media as a perfect example of the horrifics of popular, local control. So what do you do about the protection of individual rights, if anything; and within the economic redistribution to local control, what do you do about the inequality of incomes between communities? Governor Cuomo, as a way to address the state budget, has announced he is going to try to remove a lot of state mandates on local school systems, maximum class sizes, requirements to provide transportation, whatever, which local school boards with lower budgets cannot meet. What is going to happen is very simple — communities like the one I live in are going to pick up the slack on the basis of local social class, and other communities will not be able to do so.

Berman: In my previous comments, I proposed an ideal, perhaps idealized account of community as the enabling vehicle of difference. The community, recognizing itself as such, may be able to recognize its internal heterogeneity and its external limits: other people may think otherwise. The strange notion that communities are necessarily homogeneous and will stifle any internal differentiation is part of the thesis of sociological modernization that is bent on relegating all communitarianism to an archaic past (which is, moreover, misunderstood). Yet, even if we are now prepared to recognize that communitarian relations continue to thrive despite social modernization, they do so in a degraded fashion, insofar as they are beleaguered by the processes of bureaucratization and commodification — state and market — and are excluded from the scenes of hegemonic representation: communitarian loyalties are precisely not the values which are inculcated through the mass media spectacle. So, while communities, in a sense, survive (and in fact constitute the precondition for the functioning of the non-communitarian social system), they are simultaneously denied and denounced, and they appear at best as reactionary, backwards and unintelligent. It is not surprising if they do not live up to the idealized terms I set out.

It is in this context that Taves' reference to two possible objections regarding a communitarian turn have to be addressed: intolerance and (economic) inequity. For it is by no means clear that either intolerance or inequity is primarily a result of excessive communitarianism, to be remedied by state intervention. On the contrary, there is little reason to believe that greater state involvement is likely to improve matters on either score. Indeed it is the state which repeatedly has shown itself to be a motor of intolerance and a guarantor of a hierarchical distibution of wealth, and even a cursory glance at the policies of the federal government in the past decade (rather than the long-dead Great Society) would make it perfectly obvious how illusory it is to imagine the central state apparatus carrying out a rights-based egalitarian agenda. But the real point is that, even if in the highly unlikely event an administration were to come to power sympathetic to those goals, it is unclear how statist intervention would be consonant with the formerly Left value of popular control or even if such

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bureaucratic expansionism would have any salutary effect at all. The problems that Taves mentions are real, but the state may be more their cause than their remedy, which ought to be located in a revaluation of community. A non-denigrated community would have little grounds to object to an internal diversity of opinion, and an empowered local community would be more likely to resist the economic inequities pursuant to corporate capitalism than would be the "federal" government. If populism's historical record on tolerance has been problematic, there is no way to misread its commitment to mitigating a skewed distribution of wealth.

Piccone: Berman seems to have unwittingly overlooked the major point: the question of "rights." Thus his response may create the uninteded impression that they are not all that significant or, at best, merely epiphenomenal. In fact, rights have been Trojan Horses for very questionable hidden agendas. Consider one of the most used examples: the question of civil rights and the way they were used to smash Southern particularism as a bastion of racism, bigotry and reaction. How can anyone object to the use of federal law (enforced, if necessary, by federal troups) to overcome Jim Crow, stop Bull Conners and his ferocious dogs from ravaging peaceful demonstrators merely seeking the enactment of a contitutionally guaranteed equality, or provide social justice for all? According to both Left and Right conventional wisdom, it was civil rights which saved the day — another example of the centrality of rights in a world still besieged by traditional irrationality. As Adolph Reed Jr. has pointed out, however, a closer examination reveals a peculiar hidden dynamic having to do with Northern capitalist expansion and the penetration of an hitherto recalcitrant Southern society. After all, Southern racism had been going on for about a hundred years before the Supreme Court noticed it in 1954 and, the very next year, so did the founders of the Civil Rights Movement. Without retracing all the details of Reed's excellent analysis of these events, it is clear that racism did not suddenly intensify in 1954, nor did Southern blacks suddenly notice it then, but that the main explanatory variables have to be sought elsewhere than in racial injustice, resistence or the unconstitutional nature of Southern social institutions: in the massive funding of institutions meant to extend capitalist hegemony, such as the Ford Foundation, and in further capitalist expansion. And here is where what Berman indicated as the instrumental character of rights really comes in: they are usually deployed selectively to fulfill questionable "liberal" goals associated with modernity or, more precisely, with the requirements of a latent capitalist agenda having very little to do with their manifest humanitarian objectives. Thus it is not surprising that, while capitalist objectives were generally achieved, the lives of blacks on the whole did not improve significantly (except for a small middle class minority that made it into the now forcibly integrated bureaucratic apparatus, or through artificial and counterproductive affirmative action programs).

This is not an argument for Jim Crow or for the virtues of "the Southern way

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of life" — both of which were well on the way out anyway. Rather, it is an argument to show the ineffectiveness of abstract Enlightenment solutions deploying "rights" as contraposed to organic communitarian alternatives. The latter are predicated on what Norbert Elias described as civilizing processes of internalization rather than forced external impositions. The paradoxical outcome is that, after several decades of civil rights legislation, racism seems to be even more rampant than before, social inequalities even more striking, while the only tangible result seems to have been further disintegration of community structures and the growing empowerment of the members of the New Class at the expense of everyone else.

This is only one example among many. Human rights have been for years a tool of US foreign policy to criticize and delegitimate the Soviet Union and other hostile communist regimes in Eastern Europe, but not to delegitimate equally or even more repressive but non-hostile right-wing dictatorships in Latin America, Africa or Asia. Without indulging here in a philosophical diatribe to show how rights are theoretically indefensible other than on contractual grounds (which entails that they cannot be imposed on those who have not willingly entered into the contract), how their New Class interpretation is ultimately grounded either on untenable reifications such as natural law or hidden theological dogma, and how their deployment as universally valid can only be a theoretically indefensible act of cultural imperialism, it suffices to point out here the extent to which they are part and parcel of New Class ideology detrimental to the preservation of particularistic cultures and community autonomy. In a nutshell, most rights discourse is usually an ideological smokescreen meant to keep in line poor slobs in particularistic communities, which somehow behave in ways contrary to New Class norms.

Anderson: I want to take exception —immediately — to what Piccone has just said. He fails to draw any distinction between the explosion of rights discourse in the past couple of decades and the idea that there are some core rights, whether one wants to describe them as human rights at the international level or constitutional rights at the national level. The idea that all rights discourse, including the most elementary forms of free speech, freedom from torture, freedom from a number of other things, is nothing but New Class ideology, nothing but statist discourse, is just utter nonsense. We must sharply distinguish between that level of talking about rights and some form of contemporary discourse which collapses all discussions of values into discussions ofrights. Where would we be without the First Amendment? I can tell you where Piccone would be: in jail. He would have been imprisoned by the Right in the 1960s and, after the 'Carter Spring," by the New Left/New Class in the 1970s, and shot in the 1990.

Luke: By the same token, I think this whole idea of looking at individual rights or inequality of outcomes in this way is really trapped within one conception of the

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centralized bureaucratic state. It leads us to ask and expect answers to hopeless questions such as how can we, as passive citizens, as silent members of this media-driven show, find some way to have our rights guaranteed by the state, or to prevent the inequality of outcomes from continuing? Within a populist context, these are ridiculous questions. In truly constitutive communities, these questions would be raised and dealt with by the members of the community. One would not sit and watch the show on the evening news about the civil rights drama, or hope for bureaucrats to change the inequality of economic outcomes, because everyone would have some input in determining the way their own local/populist social institutions are going to be organized. This type of lived experience would be an alternative kind of modernity.

Looking at this problem in terms of traditionalism vs. modernism is useless. Because what we are trying to construct here is an alternative kind of modernity not dependent on statism, corporate bureaucracy, or New Class administration. Rather, it is one which would empower people economically, politically, culturally and technologically within the communities in which they live and work.

Piccone: One final remark about Anderson's closing statement. He asks: "Where would we be without the First Amendment?" (i.e., a right protected by the state. But the First Amendment is to protect us precisely from . . . none other than the state! Thus, if we did not have the state, or if the state was immensely weaker than it is today, we would not need the First Amendment to protect ourselves from it.

Taves: Let us move on to the last question. Put simply, what are the prospects for a populist culture? We should also spell out what we mean by a populist culture, as opposed to popular culture.

Berman: If populist politics is hard to swallow, populist culture is positively hair-raising. It conjures up some kind of imperative of hanging up paintings bought at Woolworth's or listening to Wayne Newton or happily subscribing to *Reader's Digest* . . .

Luke: That is popular culture.

Berman: Exactly, and this is one of the points where one can elaborate how distorted is the discussion of populism within established modes of representation — largely, but not exclusively, in the university. It is crucial for us to distinguish between *popular* culture and *populist* culture. "Popular culture" is a term used within the academy to ascribe to the products of the culture industry a kind of democratic validity, which is itself an argument that belies some extraordinary arrogance *vis-à-vis* the forced consumers of these products. Alternatively, populist culture means modes of aesthetic expression within the

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structure of communities. This implies, on the one hand, the institutions of a communitarian culture that have survived the expansion of the culture industry and, on the other, it includes material that has been canonized within the university (and therefore rendered inconsequential) but which substantively explores the possibility of community: Nietzsche's reading of tragedy, Beat tendencies in American poetry, or the charismatic moments in modern novels by authors like Céline or Joyce, with their efforts to uncover a common language. To be sure, these texts are not universally accessible and, in this sense, not popular — although if the state (in which liberalism vests so much trust) had decided to provide educational services worthy of human beings, they might be more accessible than they are now. But they are more involved with the exploration of community than the putatively popular novels of commercial fiction, just as in their wit and their raucousness, in their treatment of sex and obscenity, they make the so-called "popular literature" appear old-fashioned, conformist, and repressed (which is, presumably, why this latter material is so attractive in the academy). It is the complexity and difficulty of "high" literature that makes it resonate with community in its search for a language for individuals between whom the walls of alienation have fallen, to cite Adorno, whom I would, surprisingly, shift into the populist camp — at least against commercial popular culture.

Yet even the currency of the discourse on popular culture is evidence of the timeliness of the populist turn — even if "popular culture" gives it a distorted expression. It is the wrong answer to the right question. The same holds for the discussion on multiculturalism. To the extent that it has called into question the objective and universal validity of an always particularistic canon and pointed to the simultaneity of other traditions and cultural options it indicates the importance of community. Yet it has presumed the internal homogeneity of the multiple communities, as if each were now enfranchised to become the bearer of its own objective canon, repositories of values beyond question. This serial multiculturalism — like the consumerism discussed earlier — has the effect of enervating the participants, transformed into the agents of inherited or promulgated values, rather than considering them members of communities actively making and remaking their institutions and beliefs. It is, however, no surprise to discover this version of liberal multiculturalism finding the full support of establishment institutions, for which it represents a more successful mode of cultural disciplining and of a new American nationalism, mobilized against "monocultural" Europe and Japan.

Much the same holds for academic postmodernism. A legitimate undertaking insofar as it renounces the sort of erstwhile claims to the validity of a single canonic trajectory or master-narrative, from Plato to NATO, simultaneously leads to a refusal to inquire into the validity of any particular cultural objects for fear of making any kind of qualitative distinctions, since these distinctions would necessarily imply difference, which might be understood as hierarchical and therefore as politically untenable. Thus the "bad" culture is as good as

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the "good" culture, and one really does not care to pursue the matter further. The disingenuousness here is that the proponents of this relativism are themselves the agents of an extraordinarily sophisticated taste and are evidently suggesting that, for them, high culture will continue to be binding, but simply as one other local culture, whereas the left-over crap is good enough for everybody else, because they cannot read, and the academic elite has decided to refuse to teach them how.

Luke: Well, we may no longer be engaged in building master-narratives tying Plato to NATO, but President Bush and the Emir of Kuwait are busy constructing ties between the West and the Persian Gulf, perhaps from Plato to OSTO (the Oil Supply Treaty Organization). Master-narratives will keep finding places to go, even if NATO no longer exists. What I am doubting is the contraposition of *populist* to *popular* culture. Once again, such a distinction rests on the presumptions of intellectuals who argue that popular culture (listening to Wayne Newton, shopping at Woolworth's, or buying black velvet paintings, etc.) is crap. Popular culture may be received, taken, subverted and turned into a populist culture. By the same token, a *populist* culture that we may endorse as what we all want people to have might run the risk of becoming the *popular* culture that we also think people should not adopt. A populist culture would be one that would rise out of this lived experience of the community and the kind of populist democracy we have yet to discuss. But it would be one in which populist culture would again restructure its own concept of its own reality, more of a folk, ethnic, indigenous culture as opposed to a market culture, a media culture or mass culture. It would be grounded in the lived experience of a new kind of economy, a new technological framework, a new concept of communal space, and a new collectivity that this society should develop. For us to sit here and canonize the shape it should take and judge whether or not it would fit into postmodernism is really presumptuous.

Anderson: If I sense a common thread in what Berman and Luke have said, it may be the idea that a populist culture is supposed to be one in which people participate, versus, as we discussed earlier, one in which they are merely passive observers of what the culture industry is presenting. I agree with Luke that one should not try to prejudge which is which from outside. I do not think it is just a matter of saying that anything anyone wants to participate in is fine. There is a question of judging what is worthwhile and what is not. Beyond that, I agree with Berman's description of wrong answers to right questions. Since, however, it looks like it is my role here to be the liberal skeptic, I should voice my apprehension about something: if one were to implement the economic reconfigurations implied by this populist shift, is there going to be anyone to build my VCR or computer? I also fear that once we restructure our culture around things such as more indigenous and folksy art forms, I am not going to be able to purchase anything other than high quality sandals, beads and goods

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that can be manufactured by donkeys. As a modernist, I am deeply concerned.

Piccone: Something seems to be getting lost here, and that is the dialectic between so-called populist and popular culture. As Luke pointed out, the sharp contraposition of the two is misleading. If the relation between populist and popular culture is not seen in static terms as terminally antinomic but, rather, is historicized, it further exemplifies my opening thesis concerning "the inevitability of populism." In other words, a healthy populist culture should not be mechanically contraposed to a conformist and disempowering popular culture — although both characterizations are correct enough. Rather, what needs to be done is to indicate, once again, how the very genesis and growth of the culture industry, in carrying out the project of homogenization that Anderson considers a precondition to modernist communitarian forms, has unintentionally performed some useful function and, furthermore, paved the way for the possible reconstitution of a new kind of populist culture, which cannot be done by the culture industry itself. This is because popular culture is always parasitic on an earlier populist culture, and the reconstituton of a populist culture today cannot be understood as a return to some *status quo ante*; but only as the creation of qualitatively different versions.

Historically, the culture industry developed at a particular time to perform a specific task, i.e., it blossomed with the New Deal in conjunction with the campaign of Americanization after WWI, described so well by the Ewens. It was a very successful operation, at least to the extent that it did build a nation. But, in the process, it also destroyed a great deal of particularity, specificity and otherness, and managed to homogenize culture into a manipulative tool for increasingly sophisticated economic interests. Thus, today, although the US is supposedly still a country of immigrants, originally heterogeneous to the very core, it has become probably the most homogeneous country in the world. It is the only country where, notwithstanding the delirium of some lingering "radical chic" Black nationalists, there are no real ethnic movements anywhere, no major religious threats challenging religious tolerance and plurality, etc. If one compares the US to the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia, or even Germany and France, it turns out to be more homogeneous in its pseudo-heterogeneity than any other in the world precisely for the reasons Anderson laid out in his opening statement: thanks to the culture industry's successful Reebokification or Velveetification of everyone — including those allergic to Velveeta cheese or unable to tell the difference between Reebok shoes and work boots. What Anderson fails to appreciate is that the result was not a *community* in any sense of the term but a crisis-ridden *mass society* totalized not by human needs and aspirations, but by the logic of capital.

Contrary to Marxist projections, however, that crisis was not and could not be solved by substituting the logic of the state for the logic of capital, by substituting one mode of domination for another — something the New Deal did actually

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attempt on a much smaller scale than "really existing socialist regimes" elsewhere. Any meaningful solution would have had to re-engage the previously deactivated subjectivity — something possible only *after* the homogenization strategy had successfully run its course. And that is precisely what happened following the exhaustion of the New Deal model in the 1960s. It is at that time that the mass media and popular culture shifted its emphasis from concrete homogeneity to *abstract heterogeneity*. After the demise of the Great Society, the culture industry stopped idealizing homogeneous, Velveeta individuals — the heroes of "Ozzie and Harriet," "The Donna Reed Show," "Leave it to Beaver," etc. — and sought to reactivate particularity and otherness. Thus, before the late 1960s, no respectable Polish-American, Italian-American, Irish-American or whatever would identify himself or herself as such. Suddenly, they rediscovered the hyphen.

What is the meaning of the hyphen? It is a claim to an abstract particularity at a time when it no longer makes any difference. Today one can claim to be Irish-American, Afro-American, etc., while still eating Velveeta cheese, consuming the same cultural products and otherwise behaving exactly like anyone else consumerized to the bone. The hyphen is totally irrelevant from the viewpoint of the new logic of domination. Thus the old populist culture is relegitimated by the culture industry at a time when it no longer exists or can make much of a difference: as another consumer product among others. Real residual communities which have resisted homogenization and survived in spite of it are not the ones celebrated by the culture industry's strategy of abstract re-heterogenization because, in the process, they have also changed drastically. They are no longer the ones the mass media glorifies, but new types of communities predicated on new types of social relations no longer primarily ethnic, religious, or even racial. They have little in common with the phony, nostalgic representations of idealized communities which are now relegitimated in the media. In other words, they are part of a "populist culture" which has already been prehomogenized as popular culture.

In this regard, the dialectic between popular culture and populist culture must be seen as obtaining beyond the standard categories of the new culture industry — a culture industry which has already accepted heterogeneity and rejected the older, obsolete model of homogenization *qua* WASPification. Today heterogeneity has become integrated as part of a canned populist culture. When we talk about the *new* populist culture, what Luke mentioned in relation to lived experience, we are talking about something entirely different, something that is still submerged and has to be experienced directly on a different level than through the culture industry's standard modes of representation.

Berman: It is interesting that the question of values was largely relegated to the discussion of community and disappeared from the discussion of culture. That is probably indicative of the structure of contemporary culture that separates art from values, and our fear regarding the integration of values and arts

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is symptomatic of the problematic representation of community I was talking about before. If, however, we are prepared to limit the discussion of culture to art, the solution to what a populist culture might be has to avoid the reduction of culture to the folkloric. The latter is not populist culture, although at times it is popular culture — even mass produced culture. The folks out there, the populists, do not engage in the folkloric as much as they are represented doing in the mass media, just as they are probably less illiberal than suggested by the press. On the one hand, one wants to have a non-folkloric agenda for populist culture while, on the other, one has to go beyond the variously modernist and particularly avant-gardist solutions. The avant garde emerged in the earlier part of the 20th century claiming a radically oppositional status. But, by now, it is obvious that it participated in the advanced capitalist transformation of the structure of culture. So populist culture, if we can ever come up with an answer as to what it might mean, would neither be folkloric, back to the people, nor avant-gardist. What could it be instead? I do not have a complete answer, but I think it is not particularly useful to imagine a populist culture as one in which all recipients would necessarily participate. Rather, I would imagine a populist culture to be one that is about community and about participation or about the critique of non-participation. To imagine a canonizing gesture at this point that would prescribe populist culture to be that in which the sort of recipients produced by this educational system could participate would be essentially a cultural capitulation.

Piccone: Berman's comments remind me of Claude Karnoouh's article (in *Telos* 67) where he pointed out that a careful examination of what has been handed down as "folklore" during the past 100 or 150 years leads to an interesting conclusion. If one begins to compare the native costumes of Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Romania, or even Southern Italy or Greece, it becomes clear that they all look pretty much the same: they all have those silly hats, aprons, white gowns, ruffled collars, etc. The fact is that they are all inventions of a certain historical juncture. They were all invented around 1850, 1860, 1870, which explains the uniformity in their wierdness. Today the so-called folk culture follows a similar pattern. It is a New Class invention by local elites to legitimate particular interests, marketed as particularity, while in fact it amounts to another instance of identity logic: the substitution of the universal for the concrete particular. In other words, it is what New Class ideology thinks folkloristic forms should be rather than what they are historically (as can be ascertained through old paintings or photographs from the period in question).

Having said all this, it is not clear what can be added more specifically about the character of a populist culture *today*, other than that it will have to be a constitutive entity providing its recipients with identity and articulating values which integrate them as active members of their particular community instead of, as in the case of popular culture, trying to manipulate their aesthetic taste, consumption patterns and political behavior in the interest of predominant

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economic interests and political elites. It would not be something isolated, independent of other types of populist cultures. In fact, today more than ever, whatever communities there are cannot avoid being in constant interaction with practically all others. The doomsday scenario that Anderson raised of a *bellum omnium contra omnes* is New Class fiction or, at best, an unwarranted generalization of some exceptional cases. In the overwhelming majority of cases these communities do manage to live in peace, cooperation and interpenetration with each other. To the extent that communities are dynamic entities, those universalizing tendencies condemned when imposed forcibly or without the approval of the people involved, become once again desirable when developing organically within the particular communities themselves.

Luke: I want to raise one final point concerning Anderson's claim about technology, i.e., if we had a more communitarian or localistic culture, then the level of technology might not have advanced. That position presupposes that technological progress is impossible without highly centralized bureaucratic structures. It simply does not work that way. Every new invention is ultimately a work of an individual, and it often occurs in very small scale settings. The whole logic of informational or post-Fordist production is small-scale, locally based and individually driven, although it is nested within new global networks of exchange. Large centralized operations may often mass produce or market the results for central distribution worldwide, like some Taiwanese conglomerate that sells "authentic" folkloric clothing to everyone in Central Europe. This concept of culture and technology is extremely problematic. Seeing culture in terms of this new populist concept of community interaction, of legality, of technological invention and skills is a much more promising approach. Indeed, any attempt to reduce indigenous culture to the folkloric is often simply a ruse of cultural intellectuals who do not want to let local folks enjoy even some limited cultural freedom.

I want to make one final observation about how the populist community we have been discussing here might work. Obviously, this is not entirely clear, but we can say it would not mean returning to traditional restrictive forms of narrow community life. As Piccone and Berman have indicated, such revisitations are neither desirable nor likely at the present time. Instead, it must work to meet existing needs. Second, it should involve building new organizations rooted in neighborhood ties, friendships, kinship connections, and families. These complex associations might operate as the functional equivalents of many traditional communities, but without many of the old restrictive moralistic constraints that went along with them. Finally, it would entail realizing a qualitatively new and different kind of polymathic individuality, which would be far beyond the permissive individuualism embedded in the New Deal/Great Society/New World Order consumer logic of passive social integration as well as the dependent narcissistic personality of contemporary televisual culture.

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*The New Utopia: Communication Technologies**

Gérard Raulet

The French government and telecommunication administration have developed extensive new technological programs for the general public: *télématique*[1] (whose mass distribution began in 1981), and "cable television" (introduced in 1982). This policy, enacted primarily in accordance with industrial objectives, has had a social impact yet to be fully understood. To what extent is this policy of modernization part of "post-modernity"? These new means of communication do not necessarily entail an enrichment of individual and social identity, but may actually undermine them. The following will address the often asked question: "Are we headed towards an 'informational society' defined by ways of life profoundly different from present ones?"[2] Are we on the threshold of a new utopia? From a pessimistic viewpoint, this utopia is empty; from an "optimistic" viewpoint (which assumes the neutrality of science), it runs into alternatives that fall well beyond the scope of science.[3]

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* Translated by Hassan Meley

1. [Tr.] This term combines the words *télécommunications* and *informatique* (which designates computers, computer systems, software, as well as computer science).

2. Pierre Alain Mercier, François Plassard, Victor Scardigli, *La Société digitale* (Paris: Ed. du Seuil, 1984), p. 11. Henceforth cited as SD.

3. These are the conclusions reached by Lyotard and Bell. Cf. Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, trans. by Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 66-67. For a critique of Lyotard, see Gérard Raulet, "La fin de l'utopie," *La Pensée*, No. 248 (Nov.-Dec. 1985), p. 81, and *Gehemmte Zukunft* (Neuwied und Berlin: Luchterhand, 1986), pp. 135 ff. Daniel Bell, *The Coming of Post-Industrial Society* (New York: Basic Books, 1973).

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The "new communication technologies" involve a variety of fields. Given this complexity, to pose the problem of the "sociological and philosophical significance of the new communication technologies" amounts to testing Marx' claim that changes in the economic base will be reflected in the social superstructure. Posing the problem in these terms presupposes that new technologies are productive forces. They complete the evolution that turned knowledge, science and technique "as ideology"[4] into the primary productive force. If so, they extend Adorno's, Horkheimer's, and Marcuse's analysis of mass culture: base and superstructure converge; technology displaces ideology, thus diminishing the possibilities for criticism.

Delocalization and Dematerialization

The "new utopia" presupposes the disappearance of the local in favor of the spatial.[5] Delocalization means the insertion of the logic of the new communication technologies within universal history understood as rationalization. This logic is not new. Reason's claim to universal validity implies homogenization. *Anti-Oedipus* locates universal history in this "deterritorialization" and it finds its "universal truth" within capitalism, which comes into being at its own inception.[6] The technical utopia of a society decentralized by telecommunications signifies a spatialization of communication so that all localization becomes impossible.[7] It means the final dissolution of all ties and places that symbolically structured traditional society.[8]

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4. Jürgen Habermas, *Technik und Wissenschaft als "Ideologie"* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1968).

5. Pierre Furter and Gérard Raulet, eds., *Stratégies de l'utopie* (Paris: Galilée, 1979).

6. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), p. 153.

7. This is the deterritorialization of producers into *vogelfreie Arbeiter*, torn from their homelands — what, according to Marx, constitutes the origin of capitalism: the constitution of financial rather than landed fortunes, of the general equivalent and of the commodity form; the delocalization of needs into a flux of desires and, finally, the disabling sociological delocalization within capitalism, i.e., class polarization. Cf. Marc Guillaume, *Le Capital et son double* (Paris: P.U.F., 1975).

8. "Integration through the media means that you do not live in a particular place, but that you have a certain position in space. To live somewhere is to have the people who live around you as neighbors. But integration through communication suppresses local proximity, neighborhood. The people next to you are not your neighbors; they are the images that the media represent to us. The process of delocalization is imposed everywhere. The local is no longer anything but a sector of the spatial. Now, the so-called local products can be found on the supermarket specialty shelf: regional wines, Breton *charcuterie*, Lyon sausage, Cavaillon melons. The locality figures on the wrapper ('a country-style product, prepared the old-fashioned way') in proportion to the

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Within the networks of the new communications all places are equivalent. They become interchangeable to the extent that they are all, in principle, equally accessible. Delocalization takes the form of a circulation supposedly expressing ideal communication and glorifying generalized exchange, unlimited communicability, and commutation. Yet, even the previously mentioned optimistic interpretations, those still clinging to the hope of a "good social use" of an allegedly neutral technology, only see salvation, symptomatically, in *relocalization*.[9]

Delocalization concerns position not only in space but also *in time*. Thus, in the case of numerical images, there is no longer a before or an after (the model and its reproduction), but "a potential time, floating between the certain and the probable."[10] The different image-moments (the instantaneous ones) of this time are interchangeable; they do not follow a temporal hierarchy. That is why delocalization coincides with derealization: "reality" is never an empty homogeneous space, but a set of singular places.[11] Like delocalization, derealization is a function of reason's claim to universality and takes on a new character with the twist capitalism gives to rationalization. With the "invention" of the general equivalent, the condition of exchange, all things become interchangeable,

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domination of a unique and homogeneous space." Vincent Descombes, "Dé-localisation — Adresse aux utopistes," in Furter and Raulet, eds., *Stratégies de l'utopie*, *op. cit.*, p. 134. Similarly, "the countryside, the immense geographical countryside, appears as a desert-like body whose very extent has no necessity (and which one eventually tires of crossing)." Jean Baudrillard, *Les Stratégies fatales* (Paris: Grasset, 1983), p. 93. Henceforth cited as SF.

9. "The development of the media and telecommunications enables the recognition, in the local, of a nature other than that of being the terminal point of reception of an influx from the center. . . . The adventure of amateur radio is already explicit: they knew how to give form and expression back to the fragmentation of regions, to the differentiation of the audience, to the diversity of usage and 'dialect.' Similarly, experiments in *télématique* show that bulletin boards and interactivity make possible breaking away from the immobility of the local networks and entering into relations with new partners for whatever project of common interest." Luce Giard and Michel de Certeau, *L'Ordinaire de la communication* (Paris: Dalloz, 1983), p. 27.

10. Edmond Couchot, "Hybridations," in *Les Immatériaux* (Paris: Editions Autrement, 1985), p. 127. "The endogenous images on the screens are no longer duplications of the real, but its simulations. They are pure signs. The numerical synthesis of images is a further development in this sense: reality, images, fictions, i.e., everything, becomes digital as we approach another order of the visual. There is no longer a referent or a moment when object and image are co-present. The latter now refers only to a potential." Marc Guillaume, "Postmoderne Effekte der Modernisierung," in Jacques Le Rider and Gérard Raulet, *Verabschiedung der (Post-)Moderne?* (Tübingen: Gunter Narr, 1986).

11. In this sense, Giard and de Certeau speak of "the singularity of a place, particularized as the intersection of individual paths, transformed into a meeting point." Giard and De Certeau, *L'Ordinaire de la communication*, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

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deprived of their particular qualities and therefore derealized. Value becomes separated from substance, exchange value from use value.[12]

The computer is both the father and the child of this evolution. Computers operate "on structures whose order they modify."[13] The move to *numerization* is the decisive step in derealization. Any message, whatever its nature (voice, fixed or animated images) may be treated, stored, and transmitted according to the same procedures. But, above all, numerization paves the way to the manufacture of synthetic voice, music, and images.[14] Thus fiction and reality become interchangeable, even when one takes the data from a real object, since the computer can produce an infinity of images from them.[15]

The numerical image exemplifies the "utopia of transparency"[16] in

12. The final outcome of this process is the "semiocracy" of "decoded" signs (in the Deleuzian sense) described by Marc Guillaume in *Le Capital et son double* (*op. cit.*, pp. 45 ff.), where objects end up as signs of abstract desire. Science itself has long since exhibited a tendency toward "dematerialization" much more pervasive than the "dis-organization" Bloch discussed in 1929 as the reduction of the known object to the theoretical construction that grasps it and the disappearance of all ties to the human organ. In this sense, science *creates* objects of knowledge, eluding all sensory perception and all sensible representation. As with the photon, they only exist as abstract models allowing their construction as objects. Cf. Ernst Bloch, "Die Angst des Ingenieurs," in *Verfremdungen I* (Frankfurt a/M: Suhrkamp, 1962), pp. 163 ff. Cf. also Raulet, "Encerclement technocratique et dépassement pratique," in Gérard Raulet, ed., *Utopie-marxisme selon Ernst Bloch* (Paris: Payot, 1976), p. 293.

13. "The computer is no longer a machine that produces energy or transforms materials, but an informational machine that processes data by reducing them to their tiniest logical 'expression': numbers, themselves binarized and translated into electronic micropulses. The bit, the tiniest conceivable unit of information, is the elementary particle assuring the coherence of these operations." Couchot, "Hybridations," *op. cit.*, p. 124.

14. "A numerical image is an image reduced to a matrix of numbers. The computer processes these numbers in different ways, and presents the results visually on a video screen or printer. It is therefore possible to generate an image starting only with the manipulation of numbers. It is not necessary to refer to a model, a real object. But nothing prevents the numerical reproduction of an object, if desired, by the input of the data (dimensions, colors, positions, etc.) that characterize it. From these data, the computer can restore a near-infinity of different images of this object, according to the chosen system of representation. In short, an infinity of 'representations' corresponds to the 'viewing' of a single object. The synthesized image is no longer a projection resulting in a single copy, a double more or less faithful to a model, an optico-chemical *duplicatum* as with photography, a reproduction; it is an image with infinite possibilities." *Ibid.*, p. 125 ff; cf. also SD, pp. 21 ff.

15. Delocalization is also at work in the numerical image, since one can act on a numerized image by modifying the corresponding matrix: "The image is no longer presented as a closed and fixed space, circumscribed within an insuperable perimeter." Cf. Couchot, "Hybridations," *op. cit.*, p. 126.

16. On this tendency in art, see Gérard Raulet, *Natur und Ornament* (Neuweid und Berlin: Luchterhand, 1986), where this utopia is criticized from a Blochian perspective.

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that it is predicated on the abolition of the object's opacity. Thus Cubism attempts to grasp the object from all sides by breaking with the Euclidean geometry of three-dimensional space. This generates an ambiguous phenomenon: the (at least potentially) complete disappearance of form, but also the constant invention of new forms — *metamorphosis*. The form of the object reveals its inevitable anthropomorphic reference: the fact that it is a form only for a human spectator. If the latter is stripped of the demiurgical power associated with spectators, the production of images is entirely given over to itself. In the dimension of time, the image is no longer the metaphor of a model or the symbol of an ideal model to which it refers or with which it could ideally be related. *Metamorphoses* refer one to the other without entailing any unique, original or final referent. The temporal effects suggest their relation (because of the inability to rigorously reconstruct causal links) to a philosophy of history deprived of a single (and at least tandengially present) referent.[17]

This post-perspectivism of synthetic images undermines the very possibility of symbolism — what structured premodern societies and was to be reconstituted by the realization of "Reason in history" (and, in Bloch, by concrete utopia). In Blochian terms, the distinction between surface and meaning (allegory and symbol) evaporates as soon as there is no longer a referent "behind" the production of images — and as soon as surface and depth become interchangeable by a simple manipulation of numerized data. The significance of simulation is missed if it is seen as imitation. Simulation does not imitate; it *creates*. Certain applications of simulation in chemistry experiments allow the generation and testing of compounds that have not yet been synthesized. These scientific practices take to the extreme the fact that the "results are relative to the functioning of science itself as a medium."[18]

This is why Baudrillard can ask: "Is not the plate on which a certain grain of light stops in fact the cause of the latter?" The instantaneization

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See *The Principle of Hope*, trans. by Neville Plaice, Stephan Plaice, and Paul Knight (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1986), Vol. 2, chap. 38. It is enough to think of Russian constructivism, which was among the first movements to go to the extreme limits of this practice: "What its paintings achieve are fundamentally only pure interrelations. Flatly extended rectangles and strips float in continuous interrelation in space for which there is no true human measure." Cf. also Siegfried Gidion, *Space, Time and Architecture: The Growth of a New Tradition* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1941), p. 360.

17. This is the meaning of Benjamin's and Bloch's "allegory." Cf. Raulet, "La fin de l'utopie," *op. cit.*, and *Gehemmte Zukunft*, *op. cit.*, pp. 222 ff.

18. Baudrillard, SF, p. 115.

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of operations by high-speed computers simulating real time does not make information more "concrete." On the contrary, it abolishes the distance between reality and fiction: we have entered the "era of simulcra."[19] "Knowledge is no longer a reproduction; nor is it analogical or equivalent: it is rather a model manufactured from all sorts of pieces and with no origin other than its own operational matrix. It precedes the real, and engenders it."[20] Accordingly, it is a "representation without referent," and that is why "the era of the simulacrum" means a loss of all referentials.

Plato's distinctions within the production of artifice are abolished, namely, between *mimemata* (products of mimetic activity), those that reproduce the being of ideas, the "true images" (*eika*), and those that reproduce the world of appearances as given to our senses (illusions, *eidola*, *phantasmata*). Thus the concept of mimesis must be rethought, not only in its Platonic version, but also as it is developed by Aristotle in his *Poetics*. As such, it concerns historiography and the philosophy of history as fictional or *poetic* narrative.[21] If it can be something more than a simulacrum, the philosophy of history must be converted into a theory of metamorphoses, i.e., of historical configurations limited in the time of their being-together, and of their transmutations without teleology or providential guarantees.[22] It is also appropriate to reconsider the Adornian concept of mimesis, both in relation to the archetype of a punctual aesthetic practice opposed to the "dialectic of reason" and in relation to its perversion into mortifying mimesis (*Mimesis ans Tode*) in a civilization tending toward total reification. It goes without saying that the very notion of reification is radically undermined by the process of dematerialization. This eventually necessitates the reformulation of a philosophy of history in terms of a philosophy of symbolic forms.

Communication and Interaction: The Primacy of the Cognitive

New communication technologies concern, first and foremost, language (*langage*); the computer "is the first machine that 'works' in language."[23] As such, as Lyotard points out, these technologies "directly process the

19. See *L'Echange symbolique et la mort* (Paris, 1976); "La Précession du simulacre," in *Traverses* 10, (1978).

20. Louis Quéré, *Des miroirs équivoques* (Paris: Aubier 1982), p. 103. Henceforth cited as ME.

21. Cf. Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, trans. by Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), Vol. I.

22. Cf. Raulet, "Singuläre Geschichten und pluralische Ratio," in Le Rider and Raulet, *Verabschiedung der (Post-)Moderne?*, *op. cit.*

23. Couchot, "Hybridations," *op. cit.*, p. 125.

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social bond."[24] This should discourage any wishful thinking concerning the "reappropriation" or the "personalized appropriation" of the new media.[25] Technology and society do not merge in the use that the second makes of the first. This dualism has its virtues, but it also has the drawback of failing to grasp *the process of modernization*: the translation-rationalization of unquestioned tradition or preknowledge.[26]

The new communication technologies deal with written language solely as *expressibility* (*traductibilité*), i.e., as technical procedures of coding and decoding that convey a totally transparent utopia. In spite of this, it is important to remember Habermas' distinction: interaction is not reducible to spoken language. Communication technologies develop on the basis of expressibility and clarification of background knowledge. Thus they obey the logic of rationalization as the enunciation and argued justification of tacit shared values. As Habermas shows, the problem is whether this clarification will reconstitute on rational (in other words: technical) bases the implicit consensus of the lived world where interaction is distinguished from written language. The introduction of technical procedures implies a potential anomie which, although not new, has taken on previously unforeseen proportions. As the Weberian reconstruction of rationalization shows, there is no technical or administrative production of meaning.[27]

Interactive experiences are always dependent on expressibility.[28] What is crucial is the means of communication and the efficiency of the diffusion

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24. Jean-François Lyotard, *Tombeau de l'intellectuel et autres papiers* (Paris: Galilée, 1984), pp. 52 ff.

25. SD, pp. 54, 59, 81ff. In this regard, the authors of *La Société digitale* remain circumspect; in several places they suggest that the new technologies are situated "next to" the need for communication engendered by the deterioration of traditional social structures.

26. Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, trans. by Thomas McCarthy (Boston: Beacon Press, 1987), especially Vol. 2, p. 400. Henceforth cited as TCA.

27. See Habermas's reading of it in TCA. Cf. Karl Jaspers, *Die geistige Situation der Zeit*, 1931, p. 130. See also Jürgen Habermas, "Die neue Unübersichtlichkeit," in *Merkur*, Vol. 39, No. 1, (January 1985), p. 6; and the introduction to *Observations on "The Spiritual Situation of the Age,"* trans. by Andrew Buchwalter (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1984).

28. Thus, in the experiment in collective writing attempted at the Centre Georges Pompidou in connection with the exhibition on "Les Immatériaux," it was a matter of *defining words* independently of the fact that such an experiment otherwise shows very well how the implicit presuppositions of communication must be made explicit through the intervention of a common machine-language. The "game of definitions," which the participants in this experiment undertook, implies no communication or, *a fortiori*, no interaction, other than in the name. Any agreement would have been at the price of a reduction of information to its purely informative content through an effort of total translation of the implicit presuppositions into a performative language. See Chantal Noël and Nicole Toutcheff, "Une écriture immatérielle," in *Les Immatériaux*, *op. cit.*, pp. 33 ff.

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of the messages, i.e., an instrumental or strategic model. Subjects are only "the carriers of signifying systems that they actualize in their relations."[29] Within such a model, the message is entirely dependent on the code, and its reception is also reduced with respect to it. The very principle of the code is *performativity*, which substitutes control by pure operationality for rule-based social control. *The man-machine hybridization in expert systems* is an attempt to introduce another concept of "dialogue" and of "communication," i.e., what is beyond algorithms.[30] In other words, "expert systems" reformulate the famous "positivism debate" and, in the process, attempt to avoid the question of the social determination of "protocol sentences."[31] If this question is not asked, the "information" that circulates in the medium of the new technologies is seen as totally desocialized: "Undifferentiated, ordinary information, emptied of all social significance, grasped just on the level of its potential reduction to a sequence of binary signals. In the extreme, 'information' is everything that can be made an object of numerical processing."[32] Obviously, speculations concerning the social and interactive use presumed to compensate for the deficits of sociality, run up against this undeniable reality.[33]

In the final analysis, interactive use turns out to be always strategic. Consider an extreme example: that of the numerical image. These images can be forced to "speak,"[34] but it is not just a matter of a simulcrum of dialogue, since it can be submitted to a cross-examination by forcing it to give itself over. A game of strategy begins between the generating program and the subject. This is an extreme example, but it is crucial in helping reveal the displacement of the social by the cognitive and the strategic.

The claim of interactive experience to reconstitute the social bond, or at least to build a bridge between the realms of social exchange and of the rapid and autonomous development of communication technologies seems to rest on a truncated definition of "communication," which

29. Quéré, ME, p. 21.

30. Jean-Louis Weissberg, "Simuler-interagir-s'hybrider," in *Les Immatériaux*, *op. cit.*, pp. 143 ff., and 146.

31. Cf. the famous "positivism debate" between Adorno, Popper, Habermas, and Albert, and, on this question of "protocol statements," Renée Bouveresse, *Karl Popper* (Paris: Vrin, 1978), pp. 25 ff. On the controversy between Popper and the Frankfurt School, see Jean-François Malherbe, *La philosophie de Karl Popper et le positivisme logique* (Paris: P.U.F., 1976), pp. 255 ff.

32. SD, p. 23.

33. Giard and De Certeau, *op. cit.*

34. Couchot, "Hybridations," *op. cit.*, p. 126.

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supposedly differs from information by the fact that it involves reciprocity.[35] Understood as activity constitutive of an intersubjective community, communication presupposes the existence of a "metamessage": "When we say something, we also say something about what we say."[36]

This something is not a piece of information. Those engaged in communication always operate on two levels. To what extent do the new technologies assume this metamessage? To avoid biases, it is best to examine their ability to do so. Illocutionary components of the act of enunciation (order, permission, interrogation, etc.) can be coded. Thus its *explication* can be coded. It must also be possible to code, at least in part, the "pretentions to validity" that for Habermas define communicative competence.[37] In this regard, intelligibility does not seem to pose a problem since it merely presupposes the use of the same code. The claim to *truth* is reducible to cognitive content. Difficulties begin with sincerity and customary usage (*convenance*): reciprocal confidence and agreement concerning the rules of the game can be coded only at the price of procedures that are aleatory as well as dissuasive of the fact of their own complication: they demonstrate the resistance of something implicit. It may be objected that this resistance really concerns only communication by computer, that in the final analysis nothing distinguishes a video-conference from a real discussion, and that, *a priori*, new technologies are no worse than the telephone.[38] There is nothing, other than the medium of the apparatus, that necessitates *making explicit* what is implicit, or makes possible counterfeiting[39] or its pure and simple dissolution.

The uncodable metamessage results from an irreplaceable localization and of a socio-historical context that, simply put, the new technologies bracket, even destroy. In traditional societies, or in their local relics, this metamessage is not the object of any objectification. Customary usage is a tacit respect for rules that seal the pact of membership in a community

35. This is a technical definition, as is noted by the authors of *Société et informatique*, a collective publication of CREIS (Paris: Delagreave, 1984), p. 106.

36. Quéré, ME, p. 30.

37. Habermas, "Vorbereitende Bemerkungen zu einer Theorie der kommunikativen Kompetenz," in Jürgen Habermas and Niklas Luhmann, *Theorie der Gesellschaft oder Sozialtechnologie* (Frankfurt a/M: Suhrkamp, 1971), pp. 101 ff.

38. SD, pp. 49 ff.

39. One can cut off the sound of a telephone with a switch; a secretary can always pretend that her boss is "absent" or "in a meeting"; negotiators can, at a video-conference, communicate information under the table without the knowledge of their interlocutors, etc. — as anecdotal as these examples may seem.

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in which one is "always already" a part.[40] "Between what is spoken and what is tacit, customary usage gives way to a connivance by which everyone knows what is being said is not immediately what is at issue, and that nevertheless this gap between the spoken and the unspoken is the structure of exchange that is currently involved."[41] It is *this* dimension that is threatened by the privilege of the cognitive and the performative.

According to Weber's thesis, modern societies are characterized by the explication and rationalization of this normativity (the birth of law and morality defined by reason). According to Habermas, the liberal principle of publicity seeks to constitute and institutionalize a collective will by substituting for unquestioned tradition a social self-determination whereby social subjects manage the regulation of the symbolic order of their interactions: the "enlightened public" states, within the framework of a practical discussion, the reasons and ends of society as well as the norms of behavior to which members must conform.[42] Accordingly, the normative and the cognitive remain distinct and irreducible to one another: ideas are not confused with facts, no more than the subject of morality is an empirical ego. The enlightened public is transcendental, and it is ideas (Humanity, Nature, Progress, Liberty) that (re)constitute a symbolic order regulating (or having to regulate) social exchanges.[43]

What is important is to keep this distance which still characterizes the metamessage, even where controlled by Reason. It generates an *opacity* whose disappearance signifies the reduction of communication to information.[44] According to Habermas' definition, interaction is the "union through communication of two *opposed* subjects."[45] "The transparency and the obscenity of space in the promiscuity of the networks," to quote

40. As Quéré adds, "verbal exchange has no privilege, since the presentation of the body, the gestures, and the facial expressions mediatize the customary usages (*convenances*) just as much as the word. Likewise, speech (*la parole*) is often reduced to the use of stereotypes, of already-formed expressions, of formulas of politeness." Quéré, ME, p. 54.

41. Pierre Mayol, "Habiter," in *L'invention du quotidien* (Paris: U.G.E., 1980), p. 31.

42. Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, trans. by Thomas Burger (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989).

43. "Bourgeois representation at once poses a distinction and an equivalence between the real and the order of signs, the second having the task of shedding light on the immanent rationality of the first, and of naming it by reproducing it symbolically, at a distance and from above." Quéré, ME, p. 102.

44. "To inform," Giard and de Certeau write, "is first of all to overcome the resistances of place, and the opacities attached to it, to produce a system of transparency." Cf. Giard and De Certeau, *L'Ordinaire de la communication*, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

45. Habermas, "Arbeit und Interaktion," in *Technik und Wissenschaft als 'Ideologie,' op. cit.*

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Baudrillard, dissipates the opacity in which there is no communication.[46] That is why Habermas's *Theory of Communicative Action* becomes embroiled with dominant rationality at the very moment it articulates an argument (*Diskurs*) to escape it. It is a mistake to think that authentic communication rests on the reciprocal transparency of self and other. Such transparencies would "homogenize" them in an identity rendering superfluous the very necessity of communication. Of course, this identity is not necessarily that of understanding. It may also be the identity of identity and difference. Yet one cannot take the *Dialectic of Reason* seriously and place one's hopes in a rationalization which, even when argumentative, always implies making explicit what is implicit and transforms dialectical interaction into an exchange of information: *Mitteilung*.[47]

Expressivity and Obscenity: The Question of the Subject

Though he grasped their importance in *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, in *The Theory of Communicative Action* Habermas underestimates the role of "mediatization" of the public sphere that had assured, on the basis of their rational justification, the replacement of traditional norms. He does not go beyond the traditional Left, according to which these phenomena are tied to the perversion of publicity by lobbying forces. Where communication techniques replace past symbolic mediations (those of traditional usage) the public space is emptied of substance: it becomes a simple network conveying information or personal narratives.

If princely secret, or that of lobbying forces, is really the enemy of democracy, the utopia of transparency is just as disastrous to democratic representation as the disappearance of decorum is to feudal representation.[48] Contrary to the Rousseauian ideal of the transparency of the general will to itself, the functioning of democratic representation also requires distance, delay, opacity. Kant understood this when he distinguished a democracy from a republic: the people do not know how to represent themselves immediately, but do so through the intermediary of representatives, whose representativity varies as the ratio of their number to that of the people they represent.[49]

Similarly, "consensus" is not an equation but a conflictual agreement

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46. Baudrillard, SF, p. 37.

47. Cf. Jaspers' critique of scientific and technical rationality, where he distinguishes between *Mitteilung* and *Kommunikation*, in *Die Geistige Situation der Zeit*, *op. cit.*

48. Cf. in *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, *op. cit.*

49. See *Perpetual Peace*, First Definitive Article, in Immanuel Kant, *On History*, edited by Lewis White Beck (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1957), pp. 93-97.

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among partners, and this agreement rests on their "capacity to play with pragmatic and semantic differences."[50] Of course, consensus finds its legitimacy, as well as its historical effectiveness, in its claim to universality. As already indicated, however, there are two universalities: that of understanding and that of reason. Therefore, consensus owes its legitimacy and effectiveness to its coincidence with a general interest that is not the interest of all.

The "promiscuity of the networks" destroys this mechanism. The unlimited possibility of inter-individual communication generates "over-representation,"[51] which can be compared to an overexposed photograph: it no longer represents anything but light itself, i.e., only the principle of the image reduced to its potentiality, exposed to all its unrepresentable possibilities. The overexposed image is thus sublime, and like the sublime it generates terror. It also generates obscenity.

According to a paradox already articulated by Hegel (although he thought he could avoid it), rational universality is actually a fragmenting logic (*Entzweiung*): it leads to division, to the coincidence of mass and solitude, to the atomized mass.[52] This is also true for the individuals: their position in the networks makes their status as subjects precarious. Subjectivities are at once interchangeable and arbitrary: there is no longer a collective norm, no longer a "same" or a symbolic local distance with universal authority that would be their home. Subjectivities are doomed to anomic expressivity. Similarly, if there is no longer an object, there cannot be a subject either, individual or collective. Dematerialization is added to delocalization; the position of the subject becomes untenable if it does not confront another, localizable or materializable. As Baudrillard put it, "we are no longer in the drama of

50. Giard and De Certeau, *L'Ordinaire de la communication*, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

51. Baudrillard, SF, p. 90.

52. This anomie has its counterpart in the evolution of scientific procedures. Cf. Couchot, "Hybridations," *op. cit.*, p. 124. "Computer science has pushed to an extreme limit the fragmentation of operative processes." On the whole, science constitutes, to a smaller degree than ever, a normativity that takes the place of tradition and morality. This anomie can be readily documented by means of, e.g., credit cards. There is no longer a central authority managing the monetary system: "With the general use of credit cards, when money is systematically displaced at the speed of light, what meaning will a date of issue still have? There are evidently more fundamental consequences for the Banque de France. What will become of its multi-secular privilege of minting money?" Clearly, local regulations no longer exist. Cf. Jean-François Rouge, "La monnaie perd son temps, on dématérialise," in *Les Immatériaux*, *op. cit.*, pp. 195 ff. The effects of anomie begin with the abolition of the gold-standard, i.e., as soon as currencies "float" in relation to one another, and no longer in relation to a common "metacriterion."

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alienation but in the ecstasy of communication."[53]

The subject is reduced to pure "functionality."[54] It is no longer the focal point of a perceptive space: the reflexive consciousness, whose established image was the metaphor of the mirror. The post-perspectivism of synthetic images and, more broadly, of the networks undermines its position as reference since perspective "provided to the one who was *there* the interest of confirming the topological certainty of his identity and permanence."[55] It would be a platitude to conclude from all this only that the computer network realizes or reproduces by exacerbating, the priority of structure over subject. Yet, in reality, in the already mentioned experiment in collective and interactive writing at a distance, "the network itself becomes the author."[56]

Of course, identity has always been a fiction constituted at the intersection of individual and social games. But the new communication technologies challenge this very mechanism. The network creates a phenomenon of commutation which destroys the local and allows it only through ephemeral moments, floating identities, multiple and isolated language games or arbitrary associations.[57]

Floating identities are in the realm of schizophrenia or neo-narcissism, with a propensity for pseudonyms, sustained by so many little individual narratives. It is tempting to invoke *Anti-Oedipus*, with its concept of deterritorialization and decoding, as "the most characteristic and the most important tendency of capitalism": "It continually draws near to its limit, which is a genuinely schizophrenic limit. It tends, with all the strength at its command, to produce the schizo as the subject of the

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53. Baudrillard, SF, p. 90.

54. Quéré, ME, p. 113. "A new constitution of the subject appears. It is increasingly defined by its power of engenderment and production than by its capacity for reflection and interpretation." *Ibid.*, p. 114.

55. Couchot, "Hybridations," *op. cit.*, p. 128.

56. Chantal Noël and Nicole Toutcheff, "Une écriture immatérielle," *op. cit.*, p. 33.

57. In Eddy Cherki's study on the "Gretel" network (Minitel) in Strasbourg, Ulysses, one of the participants in the experiment, was in psychoanalysis. He "chose" his pseudonym by thinking of the *myth* of the winds that escaped from the crushed bag in all directions. This reconstitution (in the cinematographic sense) of the social displaces other forms of communication: "It is easier to converse with people you do not know." Thus anonymity and anomie coincide, since "what is technically possible is morally permissible." This Faustian technique liberates forces, not the least of which is sex (which has a considerable importance on the Gretel network), though its obscenity is a "blank obscenity," with the body absent. The distance between the "cruise" on Minitel and physical encounter is almost insurmountable. The quotations are taken from Eddy Cherki and Marianne Lamour's program, "Ulysses calls Maldita" (report on the Strasbourg Minitel network), (FR3/Vendredi, 1984).

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decoded flows on the body without organs. [The schizo], continually wandering about, migrating here, there, and everywhere as best he can, plunges further and further into the realm of deterritorialization."[58]

Contemporary pathologies point to an evolution. Classical hysterias have almost disappeared, obsessional neuroses are less common, while narcissistic disorders are on the rise.[59] Many pathologies break with the primacy of Oedipus. The complexities of the psychoanalytic theories of narcissism and schizophrenia cannot be discussed here, but a few remarks are in order. In "Zur Einführung des Narzissmus" (1914), Freud paved the way for a theory of autism by describing "the narcissism which arises through the drawing in of object-cathexes"[60] as a narcissistic neurosis or schizophrenic narcissism. Autism symptomatically constitutes a part of the social fantasies of advanced capitalism: withdrawal, desocialization by depoliticization, individualism, autarkic communities as "reterritorializations."[61] This autism, a reactive or secondary individuation, is inscribed in the logic of modernity as the decomposition of traditional relations: the triumph of the individual and the dissociation of social bonds. The rupture (*Spaltung*) has become the most general category for designating the different forms of schizophrenia: incoherence of thought and action, fantasmatic delirium, etc. — the sort of symptoms that turn up in the postmodern expressivity of the new communication technologies. Baudrillard proposes a definition based on the disinvestment of the object-libido and withdrawal: "Do we need help from pathological metaphors? If hysteria was the pathology of the exacerbated *mise en scène* of the subject, the pathology of expression, of the theatrical and operatic conversion of the body — if paranoia was the pathology of organization and of a rigid and jealous structuration of the world — with communication, information, with the immanent promiscuity of all the networks, with the continual branching, we would be in a new form of schizophrenia. This neat state causes the schizophrenic's terror: the overwhelming proximity of everything, the foul promiscuity of all things, which touch him, invest him, penetrate him without resistance."[62] From hysteria as "*mise en scène*" to

58. *Anti-Oedipus*, *op. cit.*, pp. 34-35; *l'Anti-Oedipe*, *op. cit.*, pp. 41-43.

59. Cf. Kohut, *Narzissmus*, (1973); *Die Heilung des Selbst*, (1979); Christopher Lash, *The Culture of Narcissism*, (1978).

60. Sigmund Freud, *The Complete Psychological Works*, trans. by James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1957), v. XIV, p. 75.

61. See Gérard Raulet, "Marxism and the Post-Modern Condition," in *Telos* 67 (Spring 1986), pp. 147-162. See also "La Fin de la Raison dans l'histoire," in *Dialogue, Revue de la société canadienne de philosophie* 22 (1983), pp. 631-646.

62. Baudrillard, SF, pp. 96 ff.

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postmodern schizophrenia as obscenity, the evolution of modern rationality carries expressivity to its paroxysm.[63]

Because of the disappearance of the normative "third symbolizer,"[64] it seems that "communication" is concentrated on the two other poles that the Habermasian classification distinguishes: the cognitive and the expressive. Most illuminating here is Richard Sennett's account, which emphasizes that social interaction rests on a *mise en scène*. In contrast to private man, public man sacrifices his subjectivity, feelings, and desires to convention. Subjectivity is never immediately available, but always mediated by collective rules. The previously discussed opacity which is inseparable from authentic social communication, resurfaces here: "The more there is transparency, the less there is sociability."[65] Following Sennett and Habermas, Quéré shows how this mediation, this third symbolizer, characterizes just as much traditional societies (and their local relics) as it does the rational public sphere of modern society beginning in the 18th century.

It is the disappearance of the obscenity-provoking *mise en scène* that Baudrillard calls a blank obscenity, in order to distinguish it from traditional obscenity and to indicate its morally neutral character: "We are all actors, all spectators with no stage — the stage is everywhere — no rule: everyone plays his own drama, improvises on his own fantasies. This blank obscenity, this scaling of transparency, reaches its summit in the collapse of the political stage. Since the 18th century, the latter has moralized and become serious. It becomes the site of a fundamental signified: the people, the will of the people, social contradictions, etc. It is summoned to respond to the ideal of a good representation. Whereas the previous political life, like that of the Court, was played in a theatrical mode, based on game and machination, henceforth there is a public space and a system of representation (the break appears simultaneously in the theater with the partition of the stage and the audience). It is the end of an aesthetic, and the debut of an ethic, of politics. The obscene is born off-stage (*hors-scène*), in the darkness of the system of representation. It is therefore, at first, obscure: it is what causes the transparency of the stage, just as the unconscious and the repressed

63. In spite of the difficulty encountered in communicating by means of interfaced microcomputers, those who conducted the experiment in collective writing state that: "Language, too, seemed to us a little bit different from the authors' usual style, sometimes more familiar, more conversational, often more emotive." Cf. Noël and Toutcheff, "Une écriture immatérielle," *op. cit.*, p. 34.

64. As Quéré aptly calls it; ME, *op. cit.*

65. Quéré, ME, p. 49.

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cause the failure of the transparency of the conscious. Such is traditional obscenity, that of the repressed sexual or social, of what is neither represented nor representable. It is otherwise for us: obscenity today is on the other side of *overrepresentation*. In the beginning there was the secret. Then there was the repressed, and that was the rule of a game of depth. Finally, there was the obscene, and that was the rule of the game of a universe without appearances and without depth — of a universe of transparency. Blank obscenity."[66]

In the context of the Habermasian classification of the cognitive, normative, and expressive realms, what this "obscenity" promotes is individual expressivity, literally de-regulated, and progressing along with the triumph of the cognitive, the operative, and the performative.[67] Narratives "of what I have seen, of what I have felt, of what I have lived, with nothing added, with no reformation or falsification of my experience,"[68] along with little narratives, multiply, taking the place of what Lyotard calls the "grand narratives," narratives of reason in history, of emancipation. They mark "the advent of a communication-revelation under the exigencies of personal expressivity, of the mutual 'undressing' of individuals."[69]

The new communication technologies give rise, in an extreme form, to what Weber called the "polytheism of values," along with the abandonment of the grand narratives of philosophy and history, and with the slogan that calls for the substitution of *mythos* for *logos*. As Weber indicated, this polytheism is a new mythology, and reason falls back into mythology.[70] The little narratives can proliferate much better than the process of derealization can make referentials disappear: "The effacement of the distinction between the real and the symbolic order, between discourse and its apparent object to the primitive models of representation: the mythic or religious word preceded the social order and, through the ritual ceremony, was incorporated into it to fashion it."[71]

This confusion of the real and the fictive can be regarded as animism — an animism that affects "delegitimated" philosophical discourse. It does not seem to save the present account by arguing about the potential

66. Baudrillard, SF, pp. 88-90.
67. On this parallellism or correlation, see Quéré, ME, p. 149.
68. Richard Sennett, *The Fall of Public Man* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1974), p. 92.
69. Quéré, ME, p. 48
70. Cf. Max Weber, "Science as a Vocation," in *From Max Weber: Essays in Socioogy*, ed. by H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1958), and Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, *op. cit.*
71. Quéré, ME, p. 103.

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effects of the new technologies, as soon as some criterion, as already indicated, no longer allows us to adopt a critical viewpoint that can convincingly legitimate itself by referring to shared values. The extent to which "little narratives" — which constitute their own norm — are incapable of reconstituting such a normative base can be seen in how the expressivity investing the interactive uses of the new communication technologies turn out to be fundamentally strategic, indistinguishable from video games, resting on the agonistic and on strategy.[72]

Container and Content: Desiring Machines

Maybe this is an "animist" account, unable to distinguish fiction from reality, or of opposing the logic of technique to that of society. The most plausible hypothesis emerging from the previous discussion is that it is no longer possible to contrapose a will (transcendental, social, or collective) to the logic of technological evolution — that in new communication technologies, superstructure and productive forces merge and that "communication machines" are "desiring machines" obeying their own logic of growth or, as Baudrillard says, of excrescence. Clearly, there is an excrescence of information, leading to inertia: "the obesity of the memory systems, of stored information henceforth no longer processable."[73] Contrary to Baudrillard, however, the increase in the capacity of "containers," i.e., of the *networks* themselves and of storage *capacities*, of *communicability* may not be decisive. The content turns out to be secondary, and it is in connection with the container that one can conclude, along with Baudrillard, that "growth is frozen in excrescence." Soon there will be one million transistors on sixteen square millimeters of silicon, and two hundred times the information on a fiber optic than on a coaxial cable. As is well known, the problem posed by the mastery of the new technologies is not one of acquiring knowledge, but of learning how to process it.

The development of Minitel in France has followed an exclusively industrial and commercial route, that of industrial development, of the "after-telephone," and of the booming of the computer industry.

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72. This is in accord with Lyotard's description of the "social bond" in *The Postmodern Condition*, *op. cit.* According to Cherki's study of the Gretel network in Strasbourg, dialogue on Minitel not only gives way to the invention of individual narratives that are quite often, if not necessarily, fictive identities, but also to strategy games consisting of hiding oneself ("You never know what people know about you"; "Are you pretty? — Yes, but I could be ugly") and in being (or letting oneself be) found ("undressed").

73. Baudrillard, SF, p. 38, and pp. 17 ff.

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This commercial logic consists of "flooding" the market to create the need (they provided the Minitel). The media nature of the product is only of secondary importance. Even if its success depends on a "link" with the social, the program was really launched independently of the latter (the primacy of supply, the passivity of demand): "Here as elsewhere, the tool evidently precedes its uses. By attributing a value in itself to technical innovation, we find ourselves with new technical means; nothing guarantees that projected applications will correspond to a genuine social need."[74]

In fact, an early projection of twenty million terminals for 1990 had to be reduced to seven million. According, again, to Cherki's findings, the effect of novelty (and therefore perhaps also the festive character and the development of expressivity) rapidly declined. Communications fell from twenty thousand to seven thousand between 1981 and 1983, giving way to a more rational use. What Cherki observed was poor motivation for certain users (a socio-economically motivated rejection among the working classes and elderly), difficulties with learning, cost of use and the disparity between media hype and real use (between fantasy and reality). He also noted that, with regard to "Gretel," the bulletin board has become accepted by the working classes and, overall, in addition to the triumph of the electronic phone book (95% of users), recreational use and the bulletin board have had considerable success, i.e., exactly that "expressive bulletin board" and "teleconviviality" previously discussed.

Cherki does not forget to evoke the "prostheses" (the "links"): associations, clubs, etc. But the diagnosis confirms the near-disappearance of the normative at the expense of the cognitive and the expressive. As for the cognitive, it does not help to point to the limits of "resocialization," because the container preceded the content, and the supply the demand, and because the problem is "social and cultural: it is the problem of needs, of contents and of new uses that are still sought. . . . We are currently able to process and circulate data increasingly faster, but what data? And what for?"[75]

Whatever "filling" (and the viability of its social use — the doubts caused by legal data banks are an example),[76] there is necessarily an

74. *L'Information quotidienne*, a CREIS publication (Paris: Delagrave, 1986), p. 96.

75. SD, pp. 59 ff. , p.10 and p. 34.

76. "Contrary to widespread opinion, the data bank is not a factor in the equalization of opportunity. It does not provide everyone access to information. One must know how to access a bank." Cf. "Le droit sur ordinateur," in *L'Informatisation quotidienne*, *op. cit.*, p. 131.

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indifference to content, and the primacy of the container is inscribed in the technological definition of communication.[77] The apparently unlimited extension of the container's capacity seems essential to it. It follows that it is up to users, the social subjects, to "choose" the content. The problem is then knowing what the development of new technologies makes of them. In addition, posing the problem in this way already assumes the arbitrariness of the content, whose mastery or resocialization depends on a multiplicity of possible choices, whose criteria it should be possible to legitimate. But, as already indicated, the very logic of the new systems of communication seems to invalidate the possibility of reconstituting such a normative basis: even the formation of groups (*a fortiori* their ability to constitute a compelling consensus) is undermined by the rhizomes formed by the networks. Substituting themselves for groups as the homes of a normative community, lobbying forces can confiscate the channels for strategic purposes.[78] Among the deceptions of "filling," one inevitably finds the propensity of the new technologies to develop or take over already constituted markets. In the Biarritz experiment,[79] which has hitherto been limited to leaving the door open to interactive uses, we find, in addition to the simple extension of access to the existing cable network (European TV channels), the traditional exploiters (mail order, *Journal Sud-Ouest*). Given the absence of social contents and the lack of criteria, the most plausible hypotheses are the maintainance of established social, commercial, and informational structures, even their reinforcement, and the risk of lobbying forces taking over. *But, above all*, it is because the lack of criteria is not just a temporary situation of lacking social expectations in the face of recent media but is inscribed in their very effects, and because its gravity then grows with the democratization of use. Reduced to individual expressivity, delocalized investments of meaning represent a literally indifferent content.

The specter of state intervention — assuming that this process does

77. "In engineering science, communication is in fact only one particular case of transportation. From this viewpoint, the only problem of communication is that of the transmission of messages in maximum conditions of efficiency — therefore that of the improvement of performance, of the quality of the channel of transmission. Their schema of communication is constructed on the primacy of the channel" (Quéré, ME, p. 19).

78. "Thus, after 1970, the Québécois experiment of local cable circuits, considered for a time to be the paragon of the French prospects, was disappointing: this technical control has not transformed the already-existing social structures, but has exaggerated them by reinforcing the hierarchies." Cf. Giard and De Certeau, *L'Ordinaire de la communication*, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

79. François Gérin "Les Vidéo-communications, images, sons, et données en liberté," report of the DAV (January 1986).

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not result in the state losing all consistency — falls under the blow of the Weberian adage: there is no administrative production of meaning. Insisting on the "primacy of the content" entails breaking with the convenient dualism characterizing voluntarist policies. Thus: "The role of a cultural politics is to create experiments favoring a social use of space innervated by networks of extensive technologies."[80]

If "technological development is a fact and no longer a matter of choice," we must get to the bottom of this idea and evaluate its impact rather than hastily proposing "options." The only "choice" is that of the more or less great, and already more or less eroded, resistance of established social networks. The choice depends on the reorientations that this resistance can impose on the logic determining the development of the containers.

For this reason, the social, political, and ideological effects of new communication technologies are ambivalent. They permit pluralism just as much as more authoritarian centralism. Is technical progress neutral and does it provide, as Bell and Lyotard think, only alternatives? This is a pious wish: it is arbitrarily grafted onto a logic that does not tolerate it. In Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition* this belief contradicts the demonstration of the triumph of performativity — to which one may easily add expressivity. If there is a neutrality in technoscience, it is in the fact that the latter imposes its own "choices" on us. This is because the true distinctive feature of these new productive forces is their penetration of the sphere that was once able to counter them with a normativity.

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80. Giard and De Certeau, *L'Ordinaire de la communication*, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

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Popular Culture and Populist Culture

Russell A. Berman

In recent years a good deal of discussion has been devoted to reconsidering the material of cultural representation and, especially, the content of university literary curricula, all of which has been relegated to the rubric of redefining the canon. There is, to be sure, something very natural and unshocking about such an undertaking. Shifting social and political concerns, changing intellectual and scholarly issues, can very understandably lead to an interest in different groups of literary texts. A conservative orthodoxy in cultural matters would quickly lose touch with the lived reality of students and the rest of society and therefore not even provide the sort of stable identity that conservative theoreticians, from T.S. Eliot to Alan Bloom, have repeatedly asserted. On the contrary, only through a constant revaluation of the material of cultural representation, a never terminated reexamination of issues of identity, tradition and values, can a society undertake an effective self-scrutiny and help clarify the goals it may choose to pursue. Culture — precisely because it is a dimension of freedom — is always involved in a teleological projection, and that *telos* is never fully or exhaustively articulated.

If, then, canonic rigidity is not socially stabilizing, if cultural conservatism does not translate into social immobility, then neither does canonic reform necessarily imply social reform and, particularly, it does not necessarily imply democratization. This insight goes to the very heart of contemporary cultural debates. For while there are compelling theoretical grounds for an on-going review of the curriculum, it does not follow that engineering curricular revisions is the same as a

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democratic or progressive social engineering. Yet this has been the metaphor that has driven much of the discussion within university circles: integrating the erstwhile "white male canon" with texts authored by minorities and women as a corollary to social integration, or displacing the objects of a denigrated "high culture" with the material of "popular culture," both moves understood as somehow obviously democratic. Getting rid of the elite texts is imagined to be the same as getting rid of the elite.

But every metaphor is always a kind of displacement. Instead of a vague corollary to political change, the culturalist agenda is, at least in part, also a substitute, an alternative, and, in fact, a denial of the very political change that is invoked as a legitimating alibi. Instead of political reform: cultural reform — the purported victims are given expression rather than power. This sort of aestheticization of politics can be viewed in various ways. In the wake of the collapse of the oppositional movements of the 1960s and the continued irrelevance of the Democratic Party (as if any wing of the Democrats had ever been oppositional), Left intellectuals, for sheer desperation, attempt to hold on to some of their political identity, now displaced into the cultural dimension: cultural studies as the memory of a failed cultural revolution. An alternative — and not incompatible argument — could analyze this culturalist shift as part of a larger transformation in which matters of representation and appearance take precedence over lived experience and material practice. In this account, it is not only the intellectual class that has become transfixed by the wonder of signs but the whole society which, trapped in the structures of ideology that now pervade all of everyday life, accepts the occupation of politics by the media and the occlusion of experience by its representations. In short-hand, the history of this formation runs from the culture industry and the society of the spectacle to a culture of narcissism, where the self is eclipsed by its own image.

Both of these versions have some validity — and some important problems — but a third hypothesis is of greater interest in the present context. It bears especially on the claim that a discrete set of cultural objects labelled "popular culture" — melodrama, harlequin romances, commercial television and cinema, for example — is somehow genuinely "popular," i.e., of the people, and therefore an authentically democratic alternative to other cultural objects, labelled "high culture" and therefore presumably associated with elite social strata. In the rhetorical context of American democracy, any suggestion of illegitimate hierarchy

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is of course tantamount to a denunciation — and in part rightly so — and this sort of opposition between allegedly high and low terrains is extremely powerful within the public sphere of universities.

My point is not at all to discredit the appropriateness of examining the material of so-called popular culture: intellectual integrity dictates that a scholarly inquiry into the substance of culture examine all possible cases and not only those conventionally and, arguably, arbitrarily recognized as worthwhile. What one wants to question however is the claim that this material is in fact "popular," with all the weighty political resonance that the term carries. One line of such questioning picks up with the objection made long ago by Horkheimer and Adorno with their insistence on prefering the term "culture industry" to alternatives such as "mass culture" or "popular culture," a preference implying that this material is commercially produced by a powerful segment of industry whose marketing interests very much depend on the pretense that its products are not its own but products of the masses or the people. The more they appear to be popular, the better the sales, and the academic proponents of popular culture turn into little more than the sales agents of the industry. Critical Theory's effort to oppose this ideological deception and to defend the *de facto* consumers against the claims of industry that the commodities of mass culture are somehow substantively a culture of the masses implies, perhaps counter-intuitively, that the notorious elitists, Horkheimer and Adorno, took sides with popular strata against the elites of the corporate boards of the culture industry. The same cannot be said, unfortunately, for the left defenders of popular culture.

There is a second and more germane line of questioning to be pursued regarding the alleged popularity of this material. Reconsider the popular culture argument. In effect, the case is being made for a shift in taste, within the specific zone of the university curriculum. An established taste, not surprisingly associated with members of an older scholarly generation, is denounced as elitist; against it, an alternative set of objects is posed and, furthermore, declared to be popular and democratic. In other words, the first argument for a shift in taste is compounded, secondarily, by a political argument, which however is not itself necessarily convincing. It is not immediately obvious that the social and political elites constitute the primary recipients of "high culture" — is it really the case that high income means high art, that Ted Kennedy and George Bush prefer Arnold Schoenberg to Wayne Newton? Nor is it self-evident that appreciation of high art is undeniable

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evidence of high social standing, etc. While there is probably some connection between social status and aesthetic taste, it is simultaneously more flexible and more complex than can be encompassed by a simplistic doubling of the vertical metaphor of high and low from society into art.

One can account for the seductiveness of this doubling — the claim that popular culture means democratic politics — in a number of ways. It may have been the case that in the eighteenth century, in the age of bourgeois revolutions, the class-coding of culture was more precise and that the differentiation between aristocratic and bourgeois cultural institutions was easily recognizable. Arnold Hauser's work might be cited in defense of that position, and this paradigm for the interpretation of the social history of culture might lend itself easily to a misapplication in the present when the class lines in culture are considerably more complex. (Or perhaps it was even more complex in the eighteenth century with aristocrats participating in bourgeois culture and vice versa.) In addition, the desire to shuttle back and forth easily between culture and politics is probably a legacy of communism which, during some phases, attempted to articulate cultural policies based on the assumption that certain aesthetic forms corresponded particularly well to particular political positions: hence the search for a politically correct art. One should remember that that historical conflation of politics and art, particularly in the early twentieth century, was extremely murky, with the aesthetic avant-garde mounting political arguments in order to justify artistic innovation and the political vanguardists making cynical aesthetic arguments to carry out political agendas. In addition, other positions within the working class movement tended to refuse the politicization of culture — as in historical social democracy — arguing instead solely for universal access to the objects of bourgeois culture: a position that probably corresponded to the behavior of working-class strata eager to display the signs of bourgeois taste as an outward indication of upward mobility. That of course would be an example of the decoupling of aesthetic taste from real social status.

Yet if we were to explain the contemporary construction of popular culture as an imitation of either the French or the Russian revolutions — or both — we would still be taking the equation of culture and politics at face value and missing the main point. For the linkage between the contingency of taste — one canon can be replaced with another — and the imperative of politics — popularity is preferable to elitism — is not

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at all a continuation, metaphoric or otherwise, of a democratic politics into the realm of culture but rather the pursuit of a particular politics — the politics of careerism — within the universities, where the stakes are not demolishing hierarchy, emancipating minorities, freeing political prisoners, peace and freedom, or bread and roses, but rather, more mundanely, tenure and promotion. In other words, a new taste-system, labelled arbitrarily (but not uncleverly) "popular," is invented as a tool with which to dislodge the carriers of other taste-systems with the help of a high-powered political rhetoric but without any sincere political aspirations. To rally to the cause of what, for example, Julia Kristeva has labelled "the revolution in poetic language," means carrying out the revolution in the English Department, and nowhere else, and that revolution turns out to be the next move in the musical chairs — who gets to be chairman — within the academic nomenklatura.

Let me make the provocation clear: instead of simply trying to relativize the conflation of politics and culture inherent in the advocacy of popular culture as a matter of a belated reception of Arnold Hauser or Georg Lukács or whomever, I want to question the motives behind the discourse on popular culture and therefore to treat it, following Bourdieu, as an artifical sign of distinction of a particular variant of the *homo academicus*. Popular culture is an agenda for professional status — a New Class career strategy — and not very much concerned with anything like democracy. To substantiate this offensive claim, I would have to come up with evidence of the weakness of the connection between popular culture and democratic politics, a case where the otherwise rhetorically powerful concatenation collapses and support for popular culture is coupled with contempt for the populace. As luck would have it, I present exhibit A.

In the *New York Times* of March 11, two professors of English, Constance Penley of the University of Rochester and Andrew Ross of Princeton, introduce themselves modestly: "as scholars of popular culture, we spend a good deal of our time resisting the widespread assumption that people are passive consumers of the mass media." All well and good, here we find the two rhetorical components already discussed. On the one hand, scholarly specialists understandably insist that their embattled field of expertise is interesting and complex, despite an allegedly common misunderstanding that it is solely a realm of a simplistic passive consumption — and what scholar would not be interested in making a similar claim for the wealth of his or her professional specialty? On the other hand, this first claim, in which the demands of

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intellect and career are necessarily intertwined, is simultaneouly lodged within a political rhetoric. For Ross and Penley are not only arguing, they are "resisting" and their resistance entails a defense of "people" whom others misunderstand as "passive consumers." Ross and Penley know otherwise, and rush to the defense of the "people," and therefore take up arms against some heavy opponents. Thus they continue: "This myth is expedient for those with an interest in overestimating the media's power — usually media professionals — and for those whose job is to persuade clients and sponsors, commercial or political, that their messages can be delivered." Suddenly the attempt to defend the intellectual viability of the study of popular culture — and, by extension, the canonic legitimacy of its objects — has been expanded into a political program, a defense of popular aesthetic habits against derogatory characterizations emanating from the board rooms of the culture industry and, presumably, from cultural elitists as well. The scholars of popular culture turn out to be the vigilant guardians of the people.

Pausing for a moment, one notes the similarity and difference to the classical position of Critical Theory: similar because Horkheimer and Adorno, with their terminological choice already discussed, also tried to separate the masses from the ideology of mass culture; different, however, because for Horkheimer and Adorno (and for Guy Debord as well) the culture industry has the tendency to devastate its recipients through effective means of manipulation, while Penley and Ross want to imagine the recipients as more or less immune to the manipulative schemes of the industry, always somehow independent agents and not "passive consumers of the mass media." In fact, on this point, the account of Penley and Ross is more attractive than that of the Frankfurt School, which one has come to read historically, i.e., the culture industry thesis, as part of a description of homogenizing aspects within 20th century capitalism. This was probably an accurate critique of the conformist and bureaucratizing tendencies during the construction of the welfare state but no longer captures the dynamic of a society in which considerably more negativity and difference are allowed outside of — and as a corrective to — the administrate apparatus. Going beyond the eradicationism inherent in the model of the culture industry, Penley and Ross try to recognize the potentially activist recipient, despite bureaucracy.

Yet just at the point where the advocacy of popular culture might really turn into an appreciation for popular — or populist? —

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sentiment, Penley and Ross back off, turn out to be as elitist as their colleagues, recoil in horror from the people and, in their rush back to the safety of scholarship, try to take popular culture — and their careers — with them, leaving the people behind. Why this turnabout? Why does the equation of popular culture and democratic politics break down?

Recently Penley and Ross have written about the Gulf War and the widespread popular support for it. This support presented a strong challenge to progressive claims regarding popular culture, because the popularity of the war tended to be attributed to an allegedly propagandistic character of the television reporting. But that is in effect a return to the manipulation thesis, which is diametrically opposed to the progressive advocacy of popular culture. If it was television that manipulated the well-meaning but simple-minded people then, alas, popular culture would turn out to involve precisely the sort of passive consumption Penley and Ross declare to be a myth. But if it is not a story of manipulation, then Penley and Ross would have to take the popular opinion seriously and at least consider the possibility that some people found convincing — and non-manipulative — grounds to support the war. That, however, would entail a radical critique of canonic political opinion. The irresistable force and the immovable object: how to save popular culture and dump popular opinion? Let's watch.

"For some," the popular culturalists write, "the popular response to the war in the gulf and its aftermath would seem to confirm the couch potato myth, resurrected in the form of the 'war potato' (or 'Scud spud'), haplessly transfixed by the 'CNN effect' of the first video war. [. . .] The so-called war potato thus seems to be the perfect example of the cultural dupe who is brainwashed by a medium that follows the White House public relations agenda." Again, that is the manipulation thesis, the mortal threat to the legitimacy of popular culture as a field of scholarly or critical inquiry and, especially, as a locus of progressivist values. While the media may have communicated a pro-war message and while the recipients may have supported the war, Penley and Ross will want to deny the causal connection that the support was a result of the receipt of the message of popular-cultural media, while they will also — it goes without saying — want to deny the legitimacy of the support. Why did the people support the war, or rather, why did the people wrongly support the war, if they were not manipulated by television? How can popular politics be wrong and popular culture be right?

The answer: "We dispute this [manipulation] thesis, and not because we think the war potato is a non-dupe who came by his or her unconditional

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support for the war through an independent interpretation of war coverage. [Why not?] On the contrary, we believe that we have a dupe on our hands, but we do not attribute this condition to the 'CNN- effect'; rather, we diagnose it as the condition of war itself." Under the pressure of the war and its popularity, the coupling of professional and political rhetorics in the discourse of "popular culture" is apparently loosening up. Manipulation does occur; the people can be duped, which is why they so disappoint the popular culturalists with their self-evidently incorrect political judgments. But the popular culturalists refuse to surrender their prefered cultural object, television, to political barbarism and invent a different source of cretinization, the "condition of war." Popular culture is saved, popular politics damned; but then the scholars of culture turn out to be just the academic experts specializing in a particular genre — television — trying to argue for its intellectual viability within the canon — why not? — but all of a sudden jettisoning the erstwhile radical posturing. The study of television is now merely another subfield, like Elizabethan drama or romantic poetry or modernist novels, stripped of the former claims of an illusory democratic privilege. The political agenda turns out only to have been the smokescreen for a professional move; the appeals to democracy, just so much careerism. No blood for oil, but maybe for tenure.

When Penley and Ross denounced the myth "that people are passive consumers of the mass media," the final words are crucial: it is not the mass media — the topic of popular culture studies — that makes the people passive consumers, but something else, so in the end the scholarly elite retains its privilege and the people really are just manipulated fools; remember, father knows best. "But it is war that makes people stupid, not TV" — a phrase worth savoring: keep your hands off my dissertation, you patriotic morons. Does the popular cultural critique of canonic hierarchy actually rest on sentiments like this? Here our friends scramble to cover their tracks: "War, most fully embodied in the command and control structure of the military, is the most undemocratic of all activities. In this light, war requires that citizens be less than citizens." Having just demonstrated their contempt for popular opinion, the authors still want to come out smelling like democratic roses: if the people support war, they are stupid, but if they watch television, they are smart. At this point, at the very latest, the ideological duplicity and confusion inherent in the discourse on popular culture, the confusion of culture and politics, have come to a dead end. For while Penley and Ross use the most sophisticated and interesting

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arguments regarding television, separating the practices of mass media spectatorship from the ideology of the mass media industry, they accept the crudest and most militaristic argument regarding war. Why be post-structuralists for television but traditionalists on war? Is war truly "most fully embodied in the command and control structure of the military?" Are not other practices, beliefs, sentiments and sacrifices involved which precisely scholars of popular culture might take seriously? Is it absolutely impossible that some supporters of the war might have minds at least as independent as those of Professor Penley and Professor Ross? Are war and democracy as fundamentally incompatible as they insist? Or should one not, alternatively, question the sincerity of their democratic pretenses and the political valences of their fundamentalist pacifism?

Perhaps Penley and Ross would like to rest for a moment, which will allow us to review the diagnosis of the discourse on popular culture. There are strong scholarly grounds to recognize television and other previously understudied materials of cultural representation as legitimate topics of research and teaching. Yet because the resources of the academy are always necessarily limited, the advocates of individual specialties engage in conflicts to defend their particular niches. It is imaginable that some of these conflicts might sometimes be carried out through the conventions of sincere intellectual argument. The problem is that the proponents of certain fields, to which the label of popular culture has been ascribed, have opted for a rhetoric of class struggle, counterposing the popular to the purported elitism of other material. In addition, as we have just seen, when push comes to shove, the sincerity of those political claims turns out to be less than unbroken. One is forced to the conclusion that, despite the democratic gestures of the popular culturalist discourse, it is no less elitist than its opponents, which it has tried to cast as a sort of cultural ancien régime. In fact, the popular culturalists may well be more elitist, since they have pushed their case by making claims in the name of the "people," and they have consequently been forced to denounce the "people" as "stupid," when the "people" have transgressed against the precepts of the political orthodoxy, a gesture which traditionalist colleagues, relatively oblivious to popular opinion, would never have been forced to make.

The suggestion that the discourse on popular culture might in fact entail an elitist agenda is surprising only if one is prepared to accept as genuine the flaunted democratizing gestures of the proponents. On closer examination, however, those gestures have turned out to be mendacious;

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the culture of the people is invoked, with egalitarian pathos, only in order to wage a campaign for the redivision of academic positions, and the people are junked as soon as popular sentiment diverges from that of the liberal elite. Yet this is nothing new, and certainly not merely a post-New-Left phenomenon. On the contrary, it has long been a strategy of upwardly mobile social and political groups to operate in the name of the people and, particularly, to invoke a fictionally constructed popular culture in order to pursue an effectively elitist agenda; the new elite battles the old by conjuring up images of the popular nation: the Ossian controversy, the ballad collections of the 1770's, the folksongs and fairy tales of German romanticism, the emergence of nationalistic folklorism in the nineteenth century, avant-gardist primitivism, the search for the proletarian aesthetic, Latin American indigenism, the *völkisch* fictions of fascism, and now the institutionalization of popular culture, all of which could be grouped under Benjamin's term as examples of an aestheticization of politics.

The historical scope of the phenomenon indicates how popular culturalism is a constant potential in bourgeois society, a result of several separate structural features. Due to the dynamic character of the modernizing economies, a constant social revolution is under way — *vide The Communist Manifesto* — with a new elite always on the rise; in this context of perpetual conflict, the egalitarian and universalizing rhetoric of national citizenship means that the more democratic position will tend to carry greater legitimacy; and the institutionalization of an aesthetic of autonomy separates taste from status, so that an emergent elite is never tied to inherited aesthetic codes and will tend to choose the taste most effective in the pursuit of its political goals. The New Class can consequently go slumming downwards in order to move upwards; the only problem is that someone else may be living in the slums, without a shot at elite status and with cultural structures incompatible with the New Class agenda.

Within this dynamic process, the discourse on popular culture is therefore directed not only against an entrenched elite; it is additionally a matter of cultural class warfare against non-elite groups with their own populist cultures. Hence the effort of Penley and Ross to preserve the democratic cachet of a commitment to popular culture while arrogantly denouncing the "stupid" values of popular politics. Populist culture: shared structures of meaning in local settings, barred from the optimism of progress and mobility and, more than likely, resistant to the concomitant disruption of community values and traditions.

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From the standpoint of any dynamic elite — including popular culturalism — it will appear conservative, rough, sedentary, and insular. Yet precisely because its central concern is community and the mediation of the concrete experience of everyday life, its potential for intersubjectivity will always be greater than that of elite culture. Similarly, because of its proximity to lived experience and its limits, birth and death, its involvment with transcendence and religion will be more emphatic, if never unproblematic in secular modernity. But since intersubjectivity and transcendence are component elements of any viable culture, populist culture always tends to have more substance and tenacity than any elite culture, including the elite discourse of popular culture, which, in turn, will always try to lay claim to its populist competitor, to colonize and destroy it through its greater access to the systems of education and the mass media. The discourse on popular culture thus entails the structures which the ideologues of the New lass attempt to project and impose on the cultural meanings and practices of the organic and self-constituting communities that survive despite the bureaucratic state, corporate capitalism, and the culture industry. Indeed, "popular culture" ends up as little more than the academic extension of the culture industry — public relations for the industry — a phenomenon that can often be traced even into the modes of debate, self-presentation, and academic style.

Advocates of popular culture delight in trivial denunciations of Adorno's elitist taste, berating him for not accepting the allegedly democratic predilections for jazz or Hollywood movies. But it has in fact always been the popular-culturalist Left that has been more elitist than Adorno, whose critique of the culture industry constantly entailed the complaint that it diluted and destroyed the pre-industrial culture of the people. The advocates of popular culture, meanwhile, continue that conformist liquidation of the culture of concrete communities: they love the masses but hate crowds. To discover that this cultural warfare from above is part and parcel of a wider strategy of the bureaucratic state to break up populist communities is hardly surprising, given the long-standing statist orientation of the Left-liberal orthodoxy. Consider liberal multiculturalism (by now the policy of most major foundations, groups which the Left once opposed): a strategy to intervene in ethnic groups and to reorganize their cultures as microcosmic imitations of established canons, while transforming concrete diversity into a cultural apartheid of separate value systems. "Grandmother, what big taste you have! — All the better to manage you with, my dear."

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Why, finally, does the domestic strategy of mulitculturalism rarely carry over into foreign policy? Does popular culturalism have a global vision? For the Left, minority groups barely existed in Nicaragua and thoroughly disappear from sight in the Soviet Union and the areas of South Africa not dominated by the ANC as state-in-waiting. The paradox is none at all. Diversity at home, as a strategy of bureaucratic management, finds a statist corollary abroad by envisioning monolithic nations, primitive unities of culture and politics, where it makes no sense to play out a popular cultural substance against state institutions. Iraq is still the urgent case, where the position of the Left is increasingly indistinguishable from that of the State Department: both adhere to the most conservative doctrine of the integrity of the sovereign state, no matter what crimes it commits against humanity, and both could not care less about the self-determination of minorities. With their congenital statist sympathies, each frets more about every single PLO bureaucrat expelled from the West Bank than about a thousand gassed Kurds. When Kurdish culture disappears, thanks will be due to our popular culturalists who explained why it was "stupid" to support the war. Not surprisingly, official efforts to provide a "safe haven" for Kurds gained momentum only after the revolutionary insurgency was crushed by the Iraqi military, with the tacit approval of the Western states and ideological cover provided by the Left (whose commitment to multiculturalism does not extend to minorities abroad, especially if they are not politically expedient). Evidently, the state bureaucrats in power and the Left (state bureaucrats in waiting) prefer to reduce the Kurds to clients of a sort of international welfare state rather than to stand by passively and allow a community to exercise its own autonomy.

For they support another war, the bureaucratic decimation of community, here and abroad, and with community the substance of local loyalties, shared values, and transcendent faith: populist culture. These policies of annihilation ensure the stability of the international state system and guarantee the life-styles and upward mobility of dynamic elites. The ideological alibis, in need of perpetual modernization include the discourse of popular culture, but always purged of the offensive stupidities of the people. The purge: a tradition the Left upholds, against leftists and against the people. "Popular culture": a directive to purge communities, and to colonize any communitarian and populist culture in order to serve New Class interests.

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Introduction to "Special Section on Musicology": Popular Music from Adorno to Zappa

Russell A. Berman and Robert D'Amico

Adorno's music criticism continues to haunt Critical Theory. Those writings are among the few developments of this entire theoretical orientation which remain largely unexplored. Unlike his philosophical writings, Adorno's works on music achieve their inscrutability not solely because of the inherent esoteric nature of the discipline (the background needed in musical theory helps keep these writings often cited but little read). Adorno's strategy was to defend the formalist avant-garde of his day, while maintaining a sometimes crude sociological account of reflection between music and social structure. (While at his best, Adorno rejected reflectioin theory, his neunced accounts of microstructured particularity were often framed by residual elements of historical materialism.) This strategy turned out to be quite clever. He adopted a formalist approach to tonality and put it in the service of a general theory of music history in which tonality and harmony bore the curse of bourgeois social contradictions. In this way, he stood outside all available views. He sounded like an obsolete musical raconteur with metaphor-laden, evocative analogies between musical forms and social events, yet he refused to defend neo-classicism, welcomed the musical plunge into dissonance, and championed what was generally held to be modernism's shocking abandonment of harmonic compositional techniques. Where he sounded most like a Marxist dogmatist, Adorno would reach anti-political conclusions (but never apolitical apologetics). He defended the very inner, tonal reflexivity in modern music that seemed to prevent the kind of discursive analyses of musical texts he simultaneously produced.

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Is it surprising, then, that Adorno proved useless to academic musicologists? He defended what many progressive academic musicologists of his day (the fad is now over) considered the correct line on where serious music ought to go, but he did so in what sounded to their ears like "programmatic" narratives of musical intentionality. In an era that wished nothing more than to make musical studies a rigorous science, Adorno wove through his music criticism immediate, ungainly analogies between musical decisions and social crises. It goes without saying that his leap over these mediations between the musical text and the historical context was itself a further strategic moment in his critical incursion into music.

While the archaeological investigation of Adorno's work on music will continue to grow as virtually the only exciting possibility for modern musical theory, there is simultaneously a strong temptation to keep replicating his approach rather than recreating the appropriate theoretical strategy. His seductive style and ability to turn a personal preference into a theoretical necessity both have their inevitable yet fatal allure. Also, we cannot overlook the anger often generated by Adorno's work, primarily among those deeply influenced by him. The most infamous example of this frustration over Adorno is the long-standing debate about jazz. Ulrich Schönherr revisits this debate and shows some parallels between Adorno on jazz and his equally critical treatment of Stravinsky and Wagner. This approach is insightful, since the defenders of jazz most often agree with Adorno's attacks on neo-classicism and the *ersatz* mysticism of Wagnerian pseudo-profundity. Though Schönherr's discussion raises doubts about Adorno's convenient charge of "totalitarian" whenever and against whomever he pleases, Schönherr's defense of jazz reduces to the oft-made claims that jazz is really more complex, truly resistant to market mechanisms, and dismissed only because of Adorno's ignorance about the musical form. Unfortunately, in precisely this case, Adorno's original argument has more rather than less contemporary significance.

In the late 1950s and 1960s, jazz was placed within the context of racial politics, proclaiming its revolutionary, emancipatory, and disruptive impact. This feigned musical upheavel was glorified as black resistance to slavery and oppression. Subsequently, through increasing exploration of chromaticism, dissonance, and atonality, jazz came under the influence of both the avant-garde and classical music. By the 1980s, jazz is being remarketed as America's contribution to classical and traditional music. In Adorno's diagnosis, which rejects any simplified parallel between music and social content (further confusing to those readers who think

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such conclusions follow directly from Adorno's own reflection theory), this subsequent evolution into a safe and contained musical experiment was predicted and explained. To continue to defend jazz, as Schönherr does, through its later exponents and more "artsy" performances vastly underestimates the force of Adorno's suspicion of emancipatory appearances.

As against the problem of jazz, the importance of the commodity in Adorno's analysis of popular music is not only uncontroversial today but wholly agreeable to the proponents of Critical Theory, the whole motley cultural criticism movement, and the currently disaffected and ambitious academic musicologists. As John Bokina demonstrates in his review of Susan McClary's feminist theory of music, Adorno's appeal extends to those who, like the defenders of jazz, become confused and impatient with Adorno's refusal to license programmatic rebellion in music. McClary's attempt to retain the theory of musical reflection by substituting gender wherever Adorno points to bourgeois contradictions (in other words, building precisely on Adorno's weakest point, even if that appeal to class was important strategically) flattens musical analysis into one more field for literary criticism. This point demonstrates the importance of rethinking the entire Adorno strategy, since the debate in aesthetics is no longer in terms of formalist and internalist theories. What McClary appropriates is a consensus around "anything goes" literary occultism. To retain, in this context, the same stance as Adorno took in the 1930s and 1940s is only to encourage a misreading of Adorno's sociology of reflection which freezes Critical Theory into a doctrine.

Though Adorno's assessment of popular music has little in common with either journalistic and traditional academic contempt for the mass market, there is a similarity of tone here which again appeals to those on the Left who have very little else to politically agree on except condemnation of commercialism and the market. As Robert Hullot-Kentor suggests, we can measure the significance of popular music by the intensity of feelings among those who identify with it in their lives and the careful manner in which they defend their preferences as unique even though they are fully within the mass-produced entertainment industry.

But does Adorno's suspicion concerning popularity help us with Kentor's musical question; "Why so edgy?" The problem with Adorno and the heritage of Critical Theory is the ease with which the same answer always rises to the surface. The bewitchment of music, its impossibility, rests with the ubiquitous culture industry. In Kentor's version of

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Adorno, regression and integration are encoded in the harmonic and rhythmic conformity of these seemingly frivolous and entertaining melodies. This enormous simulation is crafted, directed, and managed in the name of cultural manipulation and commercial expansion over a population which, lacking these controls, verges on breakdown, rebellion or, most likely for Adorno, barbarism. Nothing is more archetypical of Adorno than Kentor's conclusion that "A narrow tonality alone, however, would obviously be unable to fulfill the regressive requirements of a semblance of sociality. Rather, a further — though not exclusive — requirement for this purpose is a formulaically rigid forward rhythm, increasingly marked by belly-socking, whip-lash motifs, built on top of the functional harmony." Adorno's sense that what lay behind all of this "enthusiasm" was a fascistic bent toward totalitarianism (all part of the "training," as Kentor calls it, by corporate interests) is not all that different from the "happy" vision of the culture industry which claims that what lies beyond superstructural control is an autonomous individual who, once freed from the illusion of the commodity-form, will make the world a paradise. Where these two projections of total administration agree is that until the world is redeemed by the dismantling of industrial rationality there can be no music, no entertainment, no laughter; at least none that is not cursed, deformed, and betrayed by its historicity.

The failure of the culture industry analysis was already present in its earliest formulation. With Frankfurt School consensus concerning the threat of totalizing social planning, there followed studies of the psychological structures necessary to such management strategies, the extension of planning beyond economic and political domains to culture and consumption, and then an archaeology of what hidden dimensions of bourgeois sociology and philosophy prepared the ground for such a triumph of friendly fascism. But this entire project was predicated on the reality and success of such detailed and totalistic management of social structures. Belief in the unhindered triumph of this new cultural domination had two sources; first, the understandable but nevertheless exaggerated account of centralized control in German fascism and Stalinism and, second, the massive Keynesian state-managed capital accumulation after the War, whose success and expanded consumer wealth reinforced the picture of a directed, planned, and tightly controlled corporate machinery extending from the state to the dancehall. But this account was an exaggeration and a fantasy. The success of this managerial recovery was in no way a product of intentional planning or design. It was, at best,

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a messy unintended consequence of multiple fragmentary innovations in economic "pump-priming," technological shifts from centralized industry, mass communication, and eroded social traditions. If there was a modicum of sense in proposing this analysis in the immediate pre- and post-WWII periods, its continual repetition today, by leftists, feminists, culturalists, and some conservatives only serves to maintain the power of a mythological project of perfectionist managerial control whose sole purpose is to mirror the critic's own importance and radicalism.

Even in Adorno's classic formulations of his position, the reader often senses the fiction of the culture industry thesis. For example, Adorno's despair before this juggernaut in his 1936 piece on Mahler verges on a posture of subtle self-congratulation. His vision of irreconcilable pain and suffering, against any trivial cathartic release by the devices of entertainment, establishes the basis for valuing Mahler's emotional intensity over Bartok's folkish colloquialism. Mahler articulates the loss in the detritus of common materials whereas the accessible song must deny and repress it. This loss cannot be redeemed from within music, cannot be dismissed by music, and yet must always be reflected in music as impossibility. It is from this aspect of Adorno that Kentor derives his central theme; "On the contrary, every impossibility of music is a social impossibility and however music succeeds in solving any of its socially coded problems, the result must be new impossibilities so long as society itself is antagonistic."

The interview with Frank Zappa is a particularly useful antidote to the all too common academic pretensions concerning the status and significance of popular music. Zappa continually reveals how the processing of music for market distribution has nothing whatsoever to do with aesthetic imperatives, radical political messages, or personal self-expression. His realism about these matters puts into question not only the affirmative accounts of popular music by fashionable radicals, but Kentor's more sophisticated effort to ferret out disruptive challenges buried deep within the musical syntax.

In Florindo Volpacchio's reply to Kentor, he argues that Kentor poses the wrong question when he asks whether popular music has any redemptive value. Determining that a Beatles' song is not emancipatory drives Kentor to the odd conclusion that music itself is impossible. But Kentor's pessimism is only the flipside of the more common academic celebration of popular culture as a site of political resistance. Whether rock and roll is deemed politically correct or incorrect, the shared paradigm insists on judging music in terms of an emphatic linkage to politics

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and its adequacy to some agenda of revolutionary change or eschatological emancipation. Volpacchio wants to loosen up that linkage, one salutary result of which would be to deny the intellectual the privilege of posing as the last mandarin, bemoaning the triviality of conformist consumers, or alternatively as the vanguard critic, leading the masses of revolutionary music lovers: two versions of academic self-stylization.

Another result of Volpacchio's separation of exaggerated political claims from the analysis of popular culture is to stake out a different terrain. Kentor focuses on the text, as if the sort of musicological scrutiny appropriate to Schoenberg is the right way to understand the Beatles. But this is just another wrong question. Even Horkheimer and Adorno's "Culture Industry" has less to do with culture (especially not with culture as texts) and more to do with the character of industry. Unlike the classical culture industry, however, with its logic of standardization, the music industry today turns out to be able to operate with considerable diversification. This is due, in part, to massive technological changes, but even more to the changing status of heterogeneity in American society. Consumerism no longer precludes diversity; on the contrary, diversity is actually enhanced through consumer habits. This implies a third distinction from Kentor, one Volpacchio touches on only in passing: reception. Instead of judging the products of the culture industry in terms of aesthetic or political criteria appropriate to other spheres, it would make more sense to pay attention to the recipients — even if they are consumers — and try to understand how they succumb to, appropriate, and transform the cultural commodities. Kentor has simply inherited Adorno's blindspot with regard to reception. Reception is never fully determinate nor fully indeterminate. Of course, the culture industry attempts to manipulate the public, and its success in selling its products is evidence that such manipulation is not wholly ineffective. But it does not work perfectly either, and an adequate cultural theory today would examine the terrain of contestation between the industry and its clientele. Whether they damn it or praise it, academics have only interpreted the culture industry; the point, however, is to change it, as every teenaged guitar-player knows.

Schönherr, Kentor, and Volpacchio are all picking up particular strands within Adorno's musicology as an encoded social theory. Schönherr tries to rescue Adorno by rescuing jazz from Adorno with Adornian arguments. Kentor tries to show that popular music's conformism resides in its repression of the formal characteristics of twelve-tone music. Volpacchio demonstrates the complexity of the industry and

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the commodity form (reminding us that Adorno, for all his Marxism, regarded the commodity, bourgeois mediation, and capitalism as vehicles for potential progress and the enrichment of subjective expression). Of course these various defenses of Adornian positions represent a gradual separation of three strands which, in Adorno's work, were tightly interwoven: the status of popular culture, formal composition, and industrial production. Precisely this unravelling indicates how, despite the efforts to rescue Adorno, the classical account of the culture industry has become historical. The true homage to Adorno is to acknowledge the historicity of his theoretical strategies.

The commerical production and distribution of modes of entertainment half a century ago contributed to the pacification of class struggles, the proliferation of a consumerist conformism, and the predominance of the one-dimensional personality required by the welfare/warfare state of a totally administered society. But history has a way of punishing success, since it was the very efficiency of the culture industry — in the form analyzed by Adorno — that has rendered it obsolete and ushered in a new logic. Post-Fordist society has no more masses, and mass culture as conformism has given way to culture-industrial diversification, a blurring of the distinction between "high" and "low" forms, and greater flexibility in reception possibilities. None of this is necessarily good or bad; it is a new terrain in which different sorts of responses are possible. Instead of adhering to Adorno's criteria of judgment with epigonic rigidity, it would make more sense to explore new answers. Instead of the false choice between isolated subjectivity and class collectivism, substantive communities may be the more likely locus of a populist culture ready to take advantage of this very necessity for diversity and decentralization.

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Marginalia on Mahler
(On the 25th Anniversary of his death, May 18, 1936)

Theodor W. Adorno[1]

Heart that cannot itself contain
Tear that light contains
Destruction, you exuberance,
Blast stone and world.

Why Mahler wrote the "Songs on the Death of Children," set to the Rückert poems, became clear to me when, for the first time in my life, a loved one died. This feeling — to be bent together to the breaking point in a powerful arc between tenderness for what is nearest and loss into what is most distant — does not have its measure in the individual misfortune which transports children into the realm of the dead. Yet the dead are indeed our children. The aura of the unfinished, which, as a halo of sacredness, surrounds those who have died prematurely, does not flicker out even in the case of adults. Yet this aura cannot encompass their scattered and abandoned lives except by condensing them. This occurs through remembrance of the dead. Remembrance combs the hair of the helpless, brings sustenance to the shattered mouth, watches over the sleep of those who will not awaken. Just as they are defenselessly abandoned to our remembrance, our remembrance is the only assistance left to them. They pass away into remembrance, and if each person who dies resembles one who has been murdered by the living, then the person also resembles one who must be saved by

1. This article was originally published in the *Vienna Music Journal 23*, No. 26/27, (May 18, 1936), pp.13-19. Reprinted in Theodor W. Adorno, *Musikalische Schriften V*, (*Gesammelte Schriften*, Vol.18) (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1984), pp. 235-241. Translated by David Pan and Ulrich Schönherr.

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the living, without knowing whether they will ever succeed. The rescue of the possible but not yet existent is the goal of remembrance. This provides the "Song of the Earth" with its governing principle: when the music of the fourth movement gazes after beauty with a few bars of the clarinets, it is as if all missed happiness were preserved in miniature through remembrance. The dead are transfigured into children for whom the possible still would be possible because they never were. This transfiguration is fully transcribed in the "Songs on the Death of Children." "I often think they only have gone out," not because they were children, but because only incomprehensible love is able to comprehend death, as if the final departure were that of children, returning children. Only as if for children can we hope for the dead.

If one were to venture to express in one word the formal law for Mahler's music — that extensive totality which, more thoroughly than any other, eludes the encapsulating formula — one might call this law the variant. It is as profoundly distinct from Beethoven's, Brahms's, and also Schoenberg's concept of variation as Mahler's gesture of invocation is distinct from every immanence of form. For his variant does not have, as does variation, a posited model binding for the form and against which the variant could test itself through dialectical intervention. Rather, his attempt to break out of the space of bourgeois music manifests itself technically as an undermining of the significance of theme as objectification, as musical object so to speak. It is smashed to pieces, into those banalities which offend all middle-brow taste; the ruins of the object world are hurled into the lava flow of intention so that they lose all rigidified form. Mahler refers back to a musical fairyland in which themes did not exist as fixed property. Consequently, he himself knows no fixed ones. The variant as slight deviation and prosaic irregularity allows all themes to emerge loosely out of each other and disappear into each other. Music as immediacy attempts to spontaneously generate itself below all canons of objectification. It is therefore irresponsible to self- righteously banish him on stylistic grounds into the 19th century simply because he liked to write horn movements and included instructions with some of his early pieces which have no more in common with his music than Bach with Brockes. To be sure, there was also a good, i.e. sinister, reason for that historical tendency. For the scorned romantic was unromantic enough to undertake the recourse to immediacy, not in the name of the restitution of any kind of submerged states of being, but rather through the power of his own state of consciousness. His critique of musical reification

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is not one which would forget the reality of reification and take to the field against it like a musically disguised Don Quixote. Strictly speaking, he deals with reified music, but with such strictness that this music shatters. The ruins of this music and the ruins of the feelings associated with it are his material. *It is over these ruins that the symphonic ratio* systematically and powerfully takes charge. To transpose the exploded object world by means of its own productive tendencies into a humanely unmediated world: that is his will; and the improvisatory variant matches action which is reality- based, yet ready for change, better than the neoclassical total stylistic intention which easily enough negates all existing reality only in order to more conveniently sustain this reality's existence. Mahler leaves it in place, but burns it out from within. The remaining formal shell then stands as an allegory not only of the past but also of that which is to come. Those who despise Mahler have understood correctly that the falling hammer of the Sixth Symphony is meant for them.

"And sing until the moon shines forth upon the black firmament." That is the landscape of the late Mahler. For this firmament has the blackness of Japanese lacquer boxes with the golden moon painted on, a precious, yet also imitated, all too common, worn out thing. He who ecstatically sings takes it seriously. He holds it close before his eyes: now the sky has the blackness of the end of the world and the moon, close enough to touch, shines into it like the torch of the judge, as close as the familiar things before. It is up to this that the one who is staggering holds the cup of his music. Whether it is the Luciferian gesture of the one without hope who is no longer concerned about spring and who sacrifices in the last draught all pleasure in life to his destruction, or whether it is the reconciling drink which the foundering world itself offers, no longer in need of any spring because its true, winterless time is finally commencing: no one could provide the answer. Perhaps both lie within Mahler's music: that, as fractured allegory stretched out beyond itself, the last, defiant, Luciferian gesture signifies the reconciliation; that for the one without hope the blaze of the end of the world shines as the distant light of redemption. The delicate flurrying at the end of the "Song of the Earth" is just as ambiguous. While the lonely could freeze to death within it, fearfully dissolved into the merely existing, so could it be the blissful whiteness of the rapture; snow, the last, good remnants of being which link the saved to the existing world and, as starry hope, draws those left behind to the window. The elective affinity with Dostoyevsky penetrates to the core. Ivan Karamasov has found his music

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in Mahler. This music alone is his true language.

In an early poem by Werfel appears the word *dissmiling*.[2] It could well be an escaped fragment from Mahler's music. Subjectivity here, for once, demands of language that which it cannot provide; the word corpus is over-extended and torn while the rents stand in as signs of the anti-linguistic intention toward the real: Mahler's music conducts itself in just this way at every moment. Even if its banality appears, from the perspective of the material, as the ruins of the musical object world, this banality is simultaneously produced by the ego, whose impulse toward unmediated presentation, even reproduction, of the existing, whose documentary will forgets all choice and, fed up with middle-brow musical articulation, demands so much humane expression from this articulation that it collapses and, in collapsing, becomes the banal. Yet Mahler is dissmiling in a still more precise sense: that of an enigmatically false transcendence. A worldly gesture, such as that of the smile, is heightened into the immeasurable as if it were more than worldly; it robs itself, in the blasphemous appeal, of the semblance of the ultramundane; yet this gesture's semblance receives, bestowed upon it, the answer, "Success," which is celebrated with childlike power in the Eighth Symphony: this is what occurs in Mahler's profane sacral music. When, however, a smile passes cloud-like over a face in order to disappear into the distance and leave clearness behind, Mahler's music, sweeping and lifting like a cloud, is greeting the world. Dissmiling is the gesture of farewell. Each of Mahler's pieces, from the "Songs of a Wayfarer" to the Ninth Symphony, is a leave-taking. In the theme of its *Adagio* movement, the violin climbs a motif of seconds in four steps, each one larger than the possible stride of a weak human, into its cloudy heaven: salutation of the disappearing. Of the destroyed? the living? In place of an answer the gesture remains, mute as legends. The most unbelieving and the most believing ears would be necessary to interpret it.

The ambiguous Mahler: above banal themes he sometimes wrote "with parody" and sometimes "without any parody," and when the cue is missing the High Intellect must struggle with the embarrassing question of whether or not he meant it seriously — embarrassing because it must fear being serious at the wrong point, while its humor is still out of place when there really is cause for laughter. Yet Mahler's music refuses to provide an answer to the question. That is, its banality

2. [Tr.] *entlächelnd* is a neologism: passing away, vanishing with a smile.

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is at once both parody and seriousness. In the banal the object world, claiming to be eternal, natural and verified while being revealed in the visible break as fabricated, damaged and shabby, is exposed to laughter. But the break is in turn entirely serious and literal, readable precisely as a trace — of the futile efforts of one who has made all this and for whom it then falls apart; of the damage that might be repaired, if one could only correctly piece together the ruins; of the wretched and abandoned who have everything to gain and who therefore might one day in fact win it all. The High Intellect is accustomed to calling this "literary." But with that nothing more is said about Mahler than if one were to call "literary" the grenades which once fell into the secure structure of the cathedral at Reims — except that Mahler's music serves a different purpose.

Is it not striking that those who can expound so much on the new "bonds" of music to the collective and to usefulness refuse to extend their placet to Mahler's music and instead become stubborn advocates of precisely that *l'art pour l'art* which they otherwise so quickly overlook in order to move on to their agenda? Meanwhile Mahler remains the single exemplary composer who, in reality, stands outside of the space of aesthetic autonomy and, moreover, whose music could truly be used by living people and not merely by conforming *Wandervögel*.[3] Might not those admirers of bonds be more concerned with bonds as such than with the contents for which the collective is mobilized? Are not contents that are more than the fetishized bond itself fundamentally suspect to them? Something of the answers will be discernible in the future destiny of Mahler's music.

It proves first the determination that the fate of the world no longer depends upon the individual, and it proves this determination as an individual one within the emotional categories of the specific human being. That is why it is so comfortably easy to revile his music as fractured. Yet its breaks are "correct false consciousness." No aesthetic form directed at real humanity and not at the fiction of the single individual is able to deny the single individual as an historical phase, and that which does so becomes a lie. The breaks in Mahler, as historico-philosophical lines of demarcation, define his truth. He was not, in the words of the fundamentally similar Frank Wedekind, an "artistic artist," but in his music societal movement has represented itself in terms

3. [Tr.] *Wandervögel*: Members of a branch of the German Youth Movement begun in 1896 and later co-opted by both the communist and fascist youth organizations.

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of its real victims and its concrete measure — the individual drive and its conflicts. The conclusive evidence for this is the conception of Mahler's march as it already compellingly emerges, for example, in the first movement of the Third Symphony. The march is meant for the collective and for movement in solidarity — heard, however, from the perspective of the individual. It does not command so much as it takes along, and it takes everything along, even the lowest and the mutilated, while never itself mutilating. The individual who has been taken along is never obliterated: the community of the loving is granted to him. By means of the variant, the determining assymmetry, this individual maintains himself in the march — making the misuse of Mahler's music completely impossible. Those who would otherwise have to die when they fall out of ranks -- the one in the fortifications at Strassbourg, the night sentinel, the one buried with the shining trumpets and the poor drummer boy — are those whom Mahler forms into ranks of freedom. He promises victory to the losers. His entire symphonic work is a reveille. Its hero is the deserter.

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Adorno and Jazz: Reflections on a Failed Encounter[1]

Ulrich Schönherr

Jazz is a symbol of the triumph of the human spirit, not of its degradation. It's a lily in spite of a swamp. — Archie Shepp

Daß einer sich auflehnt ist eine banale Selbstverständlichkeit. — Arnold Schönberg

I

Voices critical of Adorno's negative judgment about jazz have been heard for a long time. Accusations, characterized by catchwords such as "racism," "elitism" or "ignorance" are familiar to everyone. Another reading of the studies on jazz would be — and Adorno expressed this explicitly in his foreword to his book *Dissonances* — to understand them as a direct reply to Benjamin's essay, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction."[2]

Adorno's critique of Benjamin is more concerned with Benjamin's fairly positive view of the collective forms of reception in the new mass-media than the specific problem of jazz, which serves him here as a useful example, just as movie culture and popular music do elsewhere.[3]

1. This is an edited version of a paper presented at a conference, "Adorno and Music," held at the Center for Twentieth Century Studies , Milwaukee, WI (November 30, 1990).

2. Theodor W. Adorno, *Dissonanzen* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1962), p. 6.

3. Adorno revised at least partially his negative assessment of the film medium in the 1960s — as Hansen has shown with regard to "Filmtransparencies." Cf. Miriam Hansen, "Introduction to Adorno's 'Tranparencies on Film'," in *New German Critique*, No. 24-25, (Fall-Winter 1981-82). However, such cautious self-corrections cannot be found with regard to jazz.

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This argument has been raised quite often and Jamie O. Daniel seems to share this assessment when she writes in her most recent introduction to the English translation of Adorno's "On Jazz": " 'Über Jazz' is not really 'about' its purported subject. It is not about jazz as such. . . ."[4]

This is certainly correct, but perhaps only as correct as the statement that Adorno's book on Wagner is not only a musicological analysis, but likewise an archaeology of the culture industry;[5] just as the excursus on Homer's "Odyssey" in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* is more than textual commentary. But should we therefore entirely avoid a critical analysis of Adorno's writing on jazz because it will miss the subject of the critique within Adorno's theoretical framework? This would not only reduce the reception of Adorno to a mere immanent, exegetical function, but would also hardly match his own demand to retrieve the philosophical truth content from the inner aesthetic construction of the work of art.

A reconstruction of the most important ideas of Adorno's critique of jazz — within which the sociological aspects of music play a key role — has to focus primarily on the following topics: first, the affinity between jazz and totalitarianism; second, the complex relation to the culture industry, encompassing issues of music history, mechanisms of aesthetic production and reception, and the process of commodification; third, the psychoanalytic interpretation of the musical subject in the context of the dissolution of traditional bourgeois structures of socialization; and fourth, the musicological analysis in the strict sense, dealing with questions regarding the harmonic/melodic structure, the function of improvisation and rhythm, as well as the relation between jazz and classical music.

Everyone familiar with Adorno's writings on the aesthetics of music knows that these questions are relevant not only with regard to popular music but his discussion of Wagner, Stravinsky, Schönberg and serial music as well. Therefore, I would like to read Adorno's jazz studies in the context of his analysis of the music of the twentieth century. Despite the initial appearance of incompatibility between these musical idioms, Adorno's analysis reveals surprising analogies.

As in the case of jazz, Adorno wrote his radio talk, "The Aging of the New Music", which deals with the post-war situation of serial music, in almost complete ignorance of the subject. He confirmed this in

4. Jamie 0. Daniel, "Introduction to Adorno's 'On Jazz'," in *Discourse*, Vol. 12, No. 1(Fall-Winter 1989-90), p. 39.

5. Cf. Andreas Huyssen, *After the Great Divide* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), pp 16-43.

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a discussion with the musicologist Klaus-Heinz Metzger — who incidentally made this same reproach — and apologized with the excuse that contemporary compositions were generally unavailable.[6] But, paradoxically Adorno's diagnosis was verified by the later development of serial music, as Metzger demonstrated. The question here is whether prophecy and ignorance are linked together as happily in Adorno's studies on jazz.

II

Adorno's first essay on jazz from 1933 casts a different light on those prophetic abilities so highly praised in the example of serial music. The title of this article is "Farewell to Jazz" and it is a necrology. "The decree which prohibits the broadcasting of 'Negro jazz' has created perhaps a new legal status — but confirms only through the harsh verdict aesthetically — what has been decided technically for a long time: the end of jazz music."[7]

Aside from the fact that the vitality of the musical corpse compelled Adorno later to rename jazz a "Perennial Fashion,"[8] it is somewhat unsettling that his aesthetic critique seeks its confirmation in a complicity between jazz and the totalitarian cultural politics and German fascism.[9] Unfortunately, Adorno ignores the political implications within his own formal-aesthetic analysis, which reveals that there is an aesthetic incompatibility of jazz with the purposes of totalitarian cultures. For Adorno, there exist primarily three types of art works. "The hermetic work of art belongs to the bourgeois, the mechanical work belongs to fascism, and the fragmentary work, in its state of complete negativity, belongs to utopia."[10]

Without doubt, for Adorno jazz is a mechanical art form. Seen in terms of its inner aesthetics, the alliance between jazz and totalitarianism

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6. Cf. Heinz-Klaus Metzger, *Musik wozu. Literatur zu Noten*, ed. by Rainer Riehn (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1980), pp. 61-128; and Wulf Konold, "Adorno\Metzger, Rückblick auf ein Kontroverse" in: *Nicht versöhnt. Musikästhetik nach Adorno*, ed. by H. K. Jungheinrich (Kassel and New York: Bahrenreiter, 1987), pp. 91-110.

7. Theodor W. Adorno, "Abschied vom Jazz," *Gesammelte Schriften*, Vol. 18 (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp,1984), p. 795.

8. Theodor W. Adorno, "Perennial Fashion — Jazz," in *Prisms* (Cambridge: MIT Press,1981), p. 119.

9. This is not to associate Adorno with fascist cultural politics. In this context, however, he uses language in such a problematic and ambiguous way that it almost invites such misunderstandings.

10. Theodor W. Adorno, *Philosophy of Modern Music* (New York: Continuum, 1985), p. 126.

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can be seen by its affinity to march music: ". . . the entire arrangement of the jazz orchestra . . . is identical to that of a military band. Thus jazz can be easily adapted for use by fascism."[11] Regarding its origins, the analogy of jazz with march music is certainly correct. But, unlike Adorno's claim, jazz did not develop towards march music, but rather out of this musical idiom; a development that had already been accomplished by the 1930s.

Adorno's linking of jazz with totalitarianism did not concern solely jazz, but in different ways a number of modern composers, particularly Stravinsky. Even in 1954, the composition techniques of the serialists are, musically speaking, ". . . hardly different from political totalitarianism."[12] His permanent fear of aesthetic regression led him over and over again to identify certain musical idioms with political barbarism. Rather than basing himself upon an aesthetic analysis of the music, his judgment seems to be dominated by personal idiosyncrasy.

More complex is Adorno's account of the culture industry. Commodified mass culture converges with the dynamic of the totali-tarian state insofar as both succeed in forming the atomized subjects into a mass, be it through the militarization of the life-world or the transformation of the individual recipient into a consuming collective subject. According to Adorno, the culture industry dissolves the classical separation of culture and economy which was still characteristic for the bourgeois and submits all artistic spaces to the logic of commodification. In the course of this process the difference between 'high' and 'low' culture is increasingly levelled, if not totally liquidated. The formerly accidental commodity character of art has become totalized during the era of the culture industry and is now its most essential quality. This is particularly true for popular music and jazz: "Jazz is a commodity in the strict sense: its suitability for use permeates its production in terms none other than its marketability. . . ."[13]

Just as the culture industry in general as an affirmative agency of the *status quo* has no history for him, Adorno perceives jazz as ahistorical and solely subject to the laws of fashion which "must constantly remain the same while at the same time constantly simulating the 'new'."[14] Negating all differences between 'New Orleans' and bebop,

11. Adorno, "On Jazz," *op. cit.*, p. 61.
12. Adorno, "The Aging of the New Music," in *Telos* 75 (Summer 1988), p. 111.
13. Adorno, "On Jazz," p. 48.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 48.

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he writes in *Prisms*: "For almost fifty years the productions of jazz have remained as ephemeral as seasonal styles."[15]

Adorno never speaks so directly about the history of commercialization and the socio-cultural praxis of expropriation by the (white) culture industry as in his "Nineteen Pieces on New Music" from 1942: "Jazz, originally a marginal social phenomenon that came from the '*Lumpenproletariat*,' was completely absorbed by the communication industry. Jazz was levelled and deprived of its modestly shocking features."[16] What once has fallen for Adorno into the 'black holes' (Huyssen) of the culture industry — this machine that persistently transforms everything into exchange values — no longer has any prospect of escape from the "paradoxical immortality"[17] of commodity culture. "With jazz, a disenfranchised subjectivity plunges from the commodity world into the commodity world; the system does not allow for a way out."[18]

The culture industry for Adorno provides many entrances, but no exits which would allow, even partially, for a reversal of total reification. But this monolithic closure is also a theoretical fiction of Adorno's cultural philosophy. This insight, on the other hand, should not seduce us into overestimating or even idealizing the potential realm of subversion and resistance within the culture industry. Adorno has not noticed the ambivalent and tense dialectic between jazz and mass-culture. Instead, he labels commercial swing orchestras as the objectification of jazz *per se*. And even in 1961 "phases like swing, bebop, cool jazz" are nothing but "commercial slogans and marks" of culture-industrial "cooptation."[19]

But in bebop musical tendencies emerge which collide with the dynamic of homogenization by the culture industry. This music owed its existence primarily to a revolt against aesthetic reductions which tried to nail down jazz to mere social functions of entertainment. In fact jazz never had — perhaps with the exception of the swing era to which Adorno primarily refers — a social "mass basis."[20] Neither New Orleans jazz, which was incapable of appealing to a larger audience, nor bebop or free jazz ever reached a mass audience. However, there are

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15. Adorno, "Perennial Fashion — Jazz," *op. cit.*, p. 122.
16. Theodor W. Adorno, "Neunzehn Beiträge über neue Musik," in *Gesammelte Schriften*, Vol.18 (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1984). p. 72.
17. Adorno, "Perennial Fashion — Jazz," *op. cit.*, p. 124.
18. Adorno, "On Jazz," *op. cit.*, p. 54.
19. Theodor W. Adorno, *Einleitung in die Musiksoziologie* (Reinbek: Rowohlt, 1968), p. 44.
20. Adorno, "Perennial Fashion — Jazz," *op. cit.*, p. 117.

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two reasons why Adorno does not allow differentiations between jazz and popular music. Both are for him an inseparable part of the culture industry and its specific modes of production and distribution, and both are indebted in their construction to the musical syntax of hit songs. That tunes from Broadway musicals make up a part of the jazz repertoire is incontestable. However, in the 1940s they were increasingly replaced by genuine jazz compositions and have had since then marginal significance.

The analysis of the socio-psychological implications of jazz plays an important role in Adorno's critique, in particular for the constitution of the musical subject. On this point, his critique of Wagner and Stravinsky coincides with that of jazz. Adorno's transposition of the studies on the "authoritarian personality" and the "sado-masochist type"[21] into the realm of music takes place in the context of the decay of bourgeois subjectivity and the loss of traditional figures of authority necessary for socialization. The well-known psychic consequences are often described in terms of "ego-regression" and "ego-weakness." These changes within the process of ego-formation produce a need for socio-cultural surrogates of identification which are provided by the culture industry and, in the totalitarian state, by the dictator as surrogate father. In short, Adorno places in the center of his argument what is commonly known as the "identification with the aggressor." The standardization of music, as well as of the taste of the mass audience, functions solely to maintain social control and individual conformity to the dictates of the culture industry; whereby jazz represents for Adorno a particularly subtle form of mass manipulation because "it is not so immediately transparent."[22] However, the freedom of the improvising artist is, against the background of the orchestra, mere illusion, the spontaneous improvisation is actually "planned out in advance with machine-like precision,"[23] and the subject is not "a 'free,' lyrical subject which is then elevated into the collective but rather one which is not originally free — a victim of the collective. . . ."[24] The regression in the aesthetics of production corresponds to the regression of the recipient.[25]

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21. *Ibid.*, p. 122.
22. Adorno, "On Jazz," *op. cit.*, p. 53.
23. Adorno, "Perennial Fashion — Jazz," *op. cit.*, p. 123.
24. Adorno, "On Jazz," *op. cit.*, p. 64.
25. It is not worth confronting at this point Adorno's repeated efforts to associate jazz without hesitation with the psycho-pathological areas of disordered sexuality.

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Adorno uses his historico-philosophical diagnosis of the process of civilization, in particular of the interconnective relation between individuation, sacrifice and collective, as a platform to describe jazz — a pattern which can be found repeated almost identically in his writings on Stravinsky. However, similiar strategies occur also in his discussion of twelve-tone composition techniques, where he argues that the domination of the musical method represents the final mimesis toward the rational domination of nature by instrumental reason. It remains to be seen to what extent the applied, interchangeable, and interdisciplinary analogies within Adorno's philosophy fit the particularity of individual musical idioms.

Unfortunately there is no single musicological analysis, in the strict sense, in Adorno's work on jazz which discusses an individual composition. We can assume that he obtained his knowledge about this music from the radio, or through his collaboration with the Princeton Radio Research Project. Other important sources were publications. Winthrop Sargeant's 1938 study, *Jazz Hot and Hybrid*, might have been the most influential, and Adorno also devoted an interesting and mostly positive book review to it in 1941.[26] As late as 1961 he refers to this book and mentions it as one of the best which had ever been written on jazz.

Despite these obvious deficiencies, one can agree with Adorno's critique on a couple of points. Most of the jazz compositions up to the late 1950s remained anchored within the traditional functional harmony, though bebop had already tried to dissolve the simple harmonic structures by using more complex chord extensions and substitutions. Adorno is also right in his observation that, despite the syncopation, a basic, continuous rhythmic pulse remains normative in jazz. More problematic, however, is his perception of improvisation. "Even the much-invoked improvisations, the 'hot' passages and breaks, are merely ornamental in their significance, and never part of the overall construction or determinant of the form."[27]

This criticism might apply to dance orchestras of the swing era, but certainly not for the further developments of jazz. It remains incomprehensible in Adorno why the improvisation of great interpreters in jazz ". . .does not permit, as the improvisations of the great stage actors still do, a real altering of the material in order to give rise to a subjective

26. Theodor W. Adorno, "Wilder Hobson, American Jazz Music; Winthorp Sargeant, Jazz: Hot and Hybrid" in *Studies in Philosophy and Social Science*, No. 9 (1941).
27. Adorno, "On Jazz," *op. cit.*, p. 53.

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proclamation."[28] With regard to aesthetic production, jazz does not possess a single element which was not formulated in classical and modern music before, a fact which Adorno mentions over and over again in order to put into question the very legitimacy of jazz. The materials, as well as the various forms of expression, were ". . .familiar to Wagnerian and post-Wagnerian orchestral technique as the mute effects of the brasses. Even in the techniques of syncopation, there is nothing that was not present in rudimentary form in Brahms and outdone by Schönberg and Stravinsky."[29] Aside from the question of whether these musical idioms are comparable at all, one could also argue about the extent to which syncopation in Brahms really corresponds to the phenomenon of the "off-beat" in jazz.

Adorno had called jazz, against all "archaic-primitive" mystifications a "music of slaves."[30] But instead of taking this thought as a starting point to examine the special socio-aesthetic conditions of a musical development within which a forceful colonial practice of cultural expropriation has been inscribed, Adorno sees only the linear move out of the marginality of cultural praxis into commodity culture. The fact of this cultural expropriation is what explains, to a large extent, the electic tradition in jazz, which cannot look back on a 500 year history as does Western music.

However, the history of jazz illustrates as much a history of domestification by an overpowering culture industry as it represents an example of resistance to aesthetic homogenization.[31] It embodies the attempt to gain an identity under conditions of cultural expropriation which resists being totally co-opted by mass-culture. "Identity" in the case of jazz should not be mistaken for a musical "jargon of authenticity"; identity is always connected with identification. But unlike being a mere expression of the "identification with the aggressor" — which Adorno ascribes to the musical subject over and over again — this identity, as it emerged especially in the jazz avant-garde of the 1960s, is founded on strategies of (socio)-aesthetic liberation which correspond in many ways to developments in modern music in the 20th century. The emancipation from functional harmony, the dissolution of the conventional song-scheme, the replacement of strict metric patterns with a

28. *Ibid.*, p. 56.
29. Theodor W. Adorno, "On the Fetish Character in Music and the Regression of Listening," in *The Essential Frankfurt School Reader*, ed. by Andrew Arato and Eicke Gebhardt (New York: Urizen Books, 1978), p. 296.
30. Adorno, "On Jazz," *op. cit.*, p. 53.
31. Cf. Philippe Carles and Jean-Louis Comolli, *Free Jazz — Black Power* (Paris: 1971).

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variety of poly-rhythmic procedures, the development of new compositional forms no longer based on the theme\chorus structure, and the opening of improvisation to collective forms leading to the dissolution of instrumental hierachies prevailing in traditional jazz — all of this put previous musical practice radically into question; whereby the way out of tonality is unquestionably the climax of this development.[32]

Despite Adorno's harsh criticism, one can still find in his jazz studies passages which describe, at least *ex negativo*, utopian elements in jazz: "If one had drawn the consequences out of the syncopation and the rhythmic-improvisatory impulses, then the old symmetry and therefore also the structure of tonal harmony would have collapsed . . . then jazz would have lost its consumability and its easy intelligibility and would have changed into 'artistic' music. . . Jazz didn't engage in such ventures."[33]

The innovative practice of jazz since the late 1950s and the explosion-like radicalization of the music in the 1960s by musicians such as Ornette Coleman, John Coltrane, Charles Mingus and Anthony Braxton has largely fulfilled what Adorno had not seen realized in jazz. For him, jazz remained ". . . self-conscious illiteracy which proclaims the stupor of tolerated excess to be the realm of freedom."[34] He thereby failed to notice the immanent process of becoming literate which jazz was beginning to go through. For Adorno, one of the biggest aesthetic challenges modern music faced was ". . . the reintroduction into the composition of those who are reproducing it. In 'artistic' music (*Kunstmusik*) both are hopelessly alienated from one another, . . . In jazz it seems as if the reproducer has reclaimed his right *vis-à-vis* the work of art — man has reclaimed his right over the object."[35]

We know that for Adorno this latent utopia was realized neither in modern music nor in jazz, whose freedom did not represent for him a ". . . corrective to the bourgeois isolation of autonomous art."[36] On the contrary, its freedom is not only illusionary, but also "pseudo-democratic" and "pseudo-individualistic." Without intending a false opposition between contemporary music and avant-garde jazz, — aesthetically as well as socially both have more affinities than differences — jazz unquestionably offers more freedom with regard to reproductive possibilities. Adorno, in turn, saw within the constellation of ensemble

32. Cf. Ekkehard Jost, *Free Jazz* (New York: Da Capo, 1981).
33. Adorno, "Abschied vom Jazz," *op. cit.*, p. 798.
34. Adorno, "Perennial Fashion — Jazz," *op. cit.*, p. 127.
35. Adorno, "On Jazz," *op. cit.*, pp. 55-56.
36. *Ibid.*, p. 48.

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and soloist only the musical recurrence of the Oedipal drama, which finds its final ending in the symbolic castration of the musical subject and its sado-masochist submission to the orchestral, "paternalistic" authority.[37] He never considers whether the musical interaction of instrumentalist and collective in jazz implies a communication free of domination which is more than the "parody of a future collective process of composition."[38]

The following quotation by Charles Mingus about the active involvement of musicians in the composition process is certainly paradigmatic for the aesthetic modes of production of the jazz avant garde in the 1960s: ". . . I lay out the composition part by part to the musicians. I play them the 'framework' on piano so that they are all familiar with my interpretation and feeling and with the scale and chord progressions . . . Each man's particular style is taken into consideration. They are given different rows of notes to use against each chord but they choose their own notes and play them in their own style, from scales as well as chords, except where a particular mood is indicated. In this way I can keep my own compositional flavor. . . and yet allow the musicians more individual freedom in the creation of their group lines and solos."[39]

III

Adorno's book on Gustav Mahler from 1960 offers an alternative perspective on the strict dichotomy between autonomous art and culture industry. He was fascinated by Mahler because, unlike Wagner, Stravinsky and Bartok, he did not fall back on concepts of mythologization, primitivism, and folklorism. His specific adaptation and citation of folkloristic elements implied a critical moment, insofar as it created a space of remembrance for those musical languages which had been excluded from the realm of bourgeois culture. By preserving these elements in his music, he remembered also the class-specific context of the separation of 'high' and 'low' culture. "The inferior in him [Mahler] is the negative of the culture which failed. Form, measure, taste, finally, the autonomy of the *Gestalt* which his symphonies have in mind are

37. *Ibid.*, p. 66.
38. *Ibid.*, p. 57.
39. Quoted in Michael J Budds, *Jazz in the Sixties* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1990), p. 81. Cf. also the recordings of Charles Mingus ("Folk Forms No. 1," 1960), Ornette Coleman ("Free Jazz," 1960) and John Coltrane ("Ascension," 1965) which demonstrate the altered relation between ensemble and soloist.

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branded by the guilt of those who exclude the others from taking part."[40]

For Adorno, the subversive element in Mahler lay in the fact that he understood how to articulate, within the language of autonomous music, the rupture of the cultural antagonism. He neither restituted musically the ideology of the autonomy of the subject nor did he fall back into mythologies of false collectivity. The disparity herein is expressed as a sorrow which stems from the irreconcilability of individuation and collectivity and which holds on, however, through negativity, to a social utopia established beyond this aporia. "In the degraded and humiliated subject matter of music he digs for unauthorized happiness."[41] "Mahler's music is great not in spite of the kitsch toward which it tends, but because of the way its construction loosens kitsch's tongue, unleashes the longing which commerce exploits and which kitsch in turn serves."[42]

The treatment of cultural trash and the adaptation of the trivial, which leads in "Mahler to the challenging alliance with vulgar music"[43] without submitting to it, could also be demonstrated in the aesthetics of modern jazz. Even if the genuine material of jazz were solely the hit song, as Adorno claims, jazz never denied these origins as a part of its tradition, as the history of the so-called 'standards' clearly shows. John Coltrane's version of "My Favorite Things," from Richard Rogers' *The Sound of Music*, serves as an example of a successful transformation of aesthetic kitsch into the musical language of the avant garde. Within a period of six years he freed this tune from all functional-harmonic and metric simplicity. The contrast to the original shows most radically in the recording from 1966, within which the deconstructed thematic material only resurfaces fragmentarily throughout the largely atonal improvisations.[44] The treatment of this piece documents beyond the biographical implications also a musical self-reflection on the history of jazz and its aesthetic procedures, which converge in the 1960s to a large extent with those of contemporary music. Coltrane's step into atonality holds on in a dolorous way to a longing for tonality, which is no longer allowed from the perspective of historico-philosophical aesthetics if music does not want to decline into mere ideology. His uncompromising dismantling strips from the piece — as it were — its commodity

40. Theodor W. Adorno, "Mahler. Eine musikalische Physiognomik," in *Gesammelte Schriften*, Vol. 13 (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1971). p. 187.
41. *Ibid.*, p. 185.
42. *Ibid.*, p. 189.
43. *Ibid.*, p. 184.
44. Cf. Jost. *op. cit.*, pp. 25-26 and pp. 101-102.

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character, without betraying the promise which lies even in kitsch. For him, what Adorno appreciated in Mahler is equally true: "His integrity decided for the language of art, but the rupture between the two spheres became his own tone, a broken tone."[45]

Adorno criticized the composition technique of twelve-tone-music as mimesis toward external rationality and repeatedly complained about the impoverishment of "expression" as a consequence of repressed historical suffering.[46] Simultaneously, he looked back nostalgically to the period of "free" atonality at the beginning of this century. That at least one part of the jazz avant garde was not so distant from his concept of a "*musique informelle*," he never realized — perhaps an indication that even Adorno was not immune to the regression of listening.

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45. Adorno, "Mahler," *op. cit.*, p. 181.

46. Adorno, "The Aging of the New Music," *op. cit.*, p.107: "Repression becomes a necessity, and this repression . . . stands behind the idiosyncratic rejection of expression, which is itself one with suffering."

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The Impossibility of Music: Adorno, Popular and Other Music[1]

Robert Hullot-Kentor

The riddle of the sphinx has become: What are absolutely identical, but have nothing in common? New riddle, new punishment: Those who cannot answer, or do not even notice they have been asked, must go to the movies every weekend and listen in between to the radio, forever; it is all the same whether they end up at museums, symphony halls, or new music festivals. This punishment is no dilution of the sphinx's classical punitive prerogatives. Its life depends so exclusively on wrong answers; it is so devoted to obfuscation, that it hardly distinguishes mauling its opponents from befogging them mentally. This explains why the sphinx has always been an effusive art lover, considers its own questions artworks and itself an artist, though without ever aspiring to the rank of *artiste*. Chronicling the intertwinement of mythical and cultural history, the sphinx would insist that its original question to Oedipus counts as the first document of mass culture. Because they produce semblance, the sphinx unconditionally supports the arts, high and low, but most of all music.

Very Popular Music

Music, of all the arts, currently has the greatest social significance.[2] This claim needs documentation, though first its potential to mislead

1. This is a revised version of a lecture delivered at a conference on "Adorno and Music," November 30, 1990, sponsored by the Center for Twentieth Century Studies of the University of Wisconsin/Milwaukee.

2. Aspects of the first part of this essay were discussed in "Popular Music and Adorno's 'The Aging of the New Music', " in *Telos* 77 (Summer 1988), pp. 79-94.

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must be curtailed. Avowing the major social significance of this or that asserts a normative concept of society over the concept's critical potential and thus obscures the fact that society is asocial and that large swaths of it are meaningless. What critical cultural study needs to measure is precisely not social significance, but, for lack of language other than parody, asocial insignificance. Yet asocial insignificance turns out to be provokingly recalcitrant to binding documentation. Statistics should be just what are needed. Their abstractness is inseparable from the abstraction they measure. But these caustic, inwardly allegorical digits are of skewed expressive value. From the combed stainless steel dashboard to New Age Music, America's power is the ability to experience the glacial as cozy.[3] It is impossible, therefore, to cite relevant statistics on music in radio and TV, or the industrial dimension of popular music production, without people responding to the numbers with warm recognition.

Some other route than the statistical is needed for demonstrating the predominant social importance of music among the arts in a way that will do something other than secure the social facade. For this purpose, the first point that needs to be made is that music is the ether of what was, up until a decade ago, plausibly called "late capitalism." Music is now threaded through light industry and every public transaction and meal; some factories and almost all stores open by turning the music on and close by shutting it off. The trade-mark of EMI, one of the several international corporations that bathes the globe in music, is: "Music that means business." Under this rubric the whole of popular music is distributed, divided up according to demographic target, requisite energy level, foreground and background purposes. It is graded for industry according to the repetitiveness of the tasks taking place, and for supermarkets according to the number of steps per minute that customers are to travel their aisles.[4] Without trying to catalogue them all, the variety of ways in which people are busy with popular music is so diverse that, unlike television, there is no way to clock the number of hours it is on.

Recognizing the omnipresence of music, however, does not capture the intensity of popular music's reality. For this it is necessary to notice the degree to which reference to popular music is emotionally reciprocated. Any mention of it carries such an immediate, acute force that

3. For a discussion of the translation of the glacial into the cozy, see my "From Uplift to Gadgetry: Barbiero, Eno and New Age Music," in *Telos* 82 (Winter 1989-90), pp. 151-156.

4. Michael Fink, *Inside the Music Business* (New York: Shirmer Books, 1989), pp. 224-225.

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one has the sense of putting one's hands directly into the social — the asocial — substance itself. If in a public lecture one reads through names from Adrianne Rich to Vladimir Nabokov, through a list of world leaders, etc., as soon as one gets to Madonna and the Beatles the audience's face is transformed. The eyes shift from degrees of sober distance to something like what appears in a waitress' eyes when she asks if you would like chocolate for desert.

But, though the extensiveness of popular music and its eager acknowledgment hint at cultural primacy, the real measure of its force can only be gauged in opposition to this apparent social univocity: The instant popular music is critically broached, eyes square off warily, waiting for the wrong line to be crossed, as if, in fact, the wrong line had already been crossed. Out of deference of a particular sort — one that needs to be explained — critical discussion of popular music is rigorously tabooed. Even though entertainment is America's second largest net export, savvy leftist political economists flinch at any insinuation that their musical tastes may not be their heart's own. And though Boschian psychodynamic speculations thrive in cultural studies, depth interpretation of popular music is dismissed as a phantasm. "A"-student, transgressive readers take devil-may-care chances with Conrad's novels — works that have no contemporary ideological relevance in this country — while the vast panorama of popular music goes critically uncommented. But, even if one is determined to break the ice, this music is so perfectly defended that any writer addressing it critically feels the strength of the undertow that surrounds it in the discovery that there is no other name for it than "popular music." Like all mass culture, it gives instructions on the correct response to it,[5] and in this case no matter how it gets you, it will not let you forget: *il faut aimer*. To help keep this in mind, popular music deserves to be called: "Very Popular Music."

Why So Edgy?

What explains the undertow surrounding very popular music? Why such edginess in the midst of delight? This angry skittishness is worth studying, because it gives exceptional access to the mid-point of popular music. Further, it is a fruitful issue on which to focus a presentation of Adorno's writings on popular music. For though Adorno himself never

5. See "The Culture Industry" in Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. by John Cumming (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972), p. 167. References to Adorno's works cite English translations, when accurate, otherwise the *Gesammelte Schriften* (*G.S.*).

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addressed this particular problem, his writings give many clues for its decipherment. Its consideration therefore allows the reconstruction of Adorno's thinking on popular music in a way that draws on what is alive in his thought, rather than on what is available for systematization.

The primary clue that Adorno gives for understanding this angry skittishness is his analysis of the social function of popular music. In all those situations described earlier in which music plays a role, it serves to produce a semblance of sociality; the illusion of spontaneous, uncoerced togetherness. The need for this semblance is a situation defined by two paradoxes: first, since social integration is functional, the more that society is integrated, the more its so-called members are isolated; and, second, since the self is increasingly modeled on the principle of exchange, individuals are made more alike at the same time that this likeness establishes no commonality: an image that painters like de Chirico once tried to master on canvas. The result is that, in any context of seeming intimacy, the powers of a looming social disintegration are released along with corresponding anxieties.[6] These anxieties are those of an objective appraisal of the situation as well as all those that were once called neurotic in an age when it was not so obvious that these anxieties were the result of an antagonistic social whole and their treatment was conceived in terms of a medical model.

Popular music responds to this situation not by trying to dispel these anxieties; rather, it exploits them by promoting the regression toward which anxiety tends. As Adorno writes in *Music in Radio,* for most people music now has "the psychological function of making them infantile."[7] Adorno's point is that, while the asociality of society results in fragile selves, which tend toward regression, regression itself is musically cultivated as one of the only available means for simulating society. Popular music is able to appropriate as social treasure all that in which people were socially defeated and their individuality stunted, just because this is what people largely have in common. This is why what counts as

6. This analysis is drawn from too many sources in Adorno to cite. One passage, however, was especially important, though it has not been followed in all of its implications. Since this passage is unpublished, it is cited here: "While the individual members of society are more and more alienated from each other and from the forces which govern society, they are nevertheless becoming similar to each other and in the sphere of seeming intimacy they are becoming more completely subjected to the same forces which they actually can no longer understand." *Music in Radio*, p. 30.

7. *Ibid*. This passage is also unpublished: "For great masses of people today music exercises the psychological function of making them infantile, especially of making them recede to earlier stages of their individual development; in other words, it fixes them to such a state which they never actually outgrew." *Music in Radio*, p. 30

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pleasure in popular music is frequently indistinguishable from anxiety dreams. How does popular music promote regression? And how do elements of regression become the available material for the organization of a semblance of sociality?

Popular music has endless resources for forcing a stuffed animal into its audience's arms. The most common devises, however, are obvious yet difficult to describe just because they are equally a resource of so-called serious music. It is not only that composers such as Ives and Mahler quote and transform popular music; it is a part of classical music from Bach to Wagner. Currently, the increasing inability of any music — whether composed in conservatories or jazz clubs — to escape a tensionless matter-of-factness amounts to the transformation of all music into popular music. Recording companies have worked hard to metamorphose Chopin and Beethoven retroactively into popular music, and not without success. The distinction between popular and serious composition is, therefore, not only definitive but historical and ambiguous. It is ultimately a matter of form, about which more will be said in the following section.

Recognizing, then, the ambiguity of the description, it is still possible to note two predominant musical resources for the manipulation of regression in contemporary popular music: a narrowly conceived tonality and a motoric rhythm. Tonality in popular music is exploited as an image of the organic; in it every element touches by pushing into the next. This organicity is a *sine qua non* of popular music; it is the image of "it's alive; we're all here; we're all touching," which has the potential to establish the illusion of warm, crowded activity, no matter how vacant the situation. This image bestows the blessing of a non-existent society, as well as the assurance that all tension will be resolved.

A narrow tonality alone, however, would obviously be unable to fulfill the regressive requirements of a semblance of sociality. Rather, a further, though not exclusive, requirement for this purpose is a formulaically rigid forward rhythm, increasingly marked by belly-socking, whip-lash motifs, built on top of the functional harmony. Although people appear to join seamlessly with the rhythm, its actual force is a dialectic of coercion and adoration. Because the repetition compulsion (which is a quality of all regressive constellations) forges an inner alliance of the mechanical and the unconscious, the rhythm is a threat to the coherence of the self. This threat is overcome by sado-masochistic identification with it. The self identifies with the power that provokes its self-dissociation. The power that the self thereby

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inherits is that of surrender to power, as well as the right to be swamped by all that it was never able to resolve. The freedom gained is that of turning up the volume, which is understandably done with a vengeance. In recent years, this dialectic of coercion and adoration has been potentiated as all trace of subjective time has disappeared from the rhythm and been replaced by a strictly administrative pulse.

Identification with the rhythm, predicated on self-dissociation, makes one one with the many. The solidarity achieved by this sado-masochistic act is popular music's model for the translation of all regressive impulses into images of sociality. The primary aptitude of popular music is just the agility with which it organizes sado-masochistic impulses into figures of solidarity: from the submissive adulation of the star, in which people club together, to the longing for obedience fulfilled by the much admired "got to dance" quality of the music. Frequently, group solidarity is achieved by the externalization of fear-provoking imagery, usually rationalized by vague images of non-conformity: the taunting, ironic, yet fundamentally pedantic voice of rap music attempts to master the force of an untempered, punitive superego by subordination to it. Similarly, the irreverent rap technique of scratching the needle backwards against the record — the psychological self-mutiliation equivalent to the falsetto of an earlier decade — imitates mastery by subordination to anxiety. This device is increasingly a source of the fascination — in the sense of *fascinatio* — of popular music. Its effect is something like that of a spider that falls in front of your face, that seems to be able to see you better than you can see it; and just for this reason demands that you stare at it, and perhaps crush it. This auratic power leaping around in the spider is a projection. Popular music effectively transforms the spider into a musical amulet and offers it to the audience to gain from the powers that reside within it.[8] Ankle deep music becomes infinitely profound, while the possibility of resolving the anxiety it provokes vanishes.

Compositional Semblance and the Shock of the Familiar

Popular music can only produce a semblance of sociality because, internally, the music is a semblance of composition. The discussion of a popular song — Lennon and McCartney's "I Feel Fine" — will help explicate this relation between internal and external semblance and further distinguish the employment of resources common to both

8. Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, trans. by E. N. F. Jephcott (London: NLB, 1974), p. 224.

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popular and serious composition. The need for this discussion, however, is unfortunate because, first of all, the analysis tends to organize the song (written at a recording session and "tied together around the guitar riff"[9]) to a degree that goes beyond what the composition itself managed. The much discussed, though barely composed song, ends up looking like a Blakean wonder. Second, this type of analysis provokes endless opposition. Even though the reason for presenting the idea of compositional semblance is to make a point about popular music in general (without denying that there are compelling moments in popular songs, or that there are occasional songs of significant interest) the discussion will inevitably raise the demand that every favorite song be hauled out as counter-evidence, as if discovering an exceptional song would counter any argument made about what obviously comes out of the radio day or night. As ever, the only legitimate obligation is that popular music be endlessly scoured for what is right about it, whereas the reciprocal suggestion that other music be listened to with similar energy is met with incredulity. This is only a small sample of the objections to the critique of popular music. It is a mouse guarded by a lion. When it is taken on in detail the teary-eyed rush out to demand: "Why are you attacking a mouse?!"— to which the only good answer is: "Because it is guarded by a lion."

"I Feel Fine": Rather than approach the song in historicist fashion and justify it with appeals to the loamy traditions of boogie-woogie, Delta blues, and so on,[10] it is possible to get to central issues of its composition by noticing just how unusual — to classical ears — much of it is. The G major song springs open with accidental,[11] though no less catapulting amplifier feedback that accelerates the introduction into an angular, bluesy V7-IV7-I cadence. The first theme alone involves independently dissonant sounds and even a chromatic series of tritones that could be compared (ridiculously, though not insignificantly) to aspects of Schoenberg's early work and various 20th century experiments in extended tonality. Furthermore, the song is puzzling because the two main themes, "Baby's good to me . . . ," and "I'm so glad . . . ," are not exactly related either by similarity or contrast. On the rhythmical level, almost every measure is thrown off balance by an intricately asymmetrical, anticipatory dissonance provoking syncopation. And,

9. William Dowlding, *Beatlesongs* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1989), p. 80.

10. See David Hatch and Stephen Millward, *From Blues to Rock* (London: Manchester University Press, 1987), pp. 180-220.

11. Dowlding, *op. cit.*, p. 80.

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finally, topping it all off with a maraschino, the song ends with an interjected, "Mmmmmmm!"

Hagiographers of this music would maintain that much of this amounts to revolutionary compositional freedom from convention. And it is true that the Beatles were exceptionally talented musicians and after them popular music was less predictable than it previously was. But, in spite of all the ways that this music runs contrary to classical standards, any claim to real non-conformity is denied by the fact that, while its peculiarities catch the ear, they never become important. The process of the song is the neutralization of every anti-conventional element it contains, though not in the sense of a selling out of avant-garde technics. How does this happen?

The fate of the dissonances is characteristic. Whereas the radical claim of autonomous dissonance is unrepeatable individuality, the dissonances of "I Feel Fine" are capped by authentic cadences and simply repeated, regardless of what has transpired. The dissonances are reduced to empty transitions, which the emancipation of dissonance promised to make obsolete. This confirms Adorno's 1940's critique of popular music that in it the whole is given whereas the complexities have no influence over its actual course. This does not mean that the dissonances are not memorable. On the contrary, because the whole is both presupposed and not attended to, the song is distractedly heard in spots, here and there. While the result is that the punctual, special effects of each song are kept in mind, they are without significance. This is something that every listener has experienced in the sensed compulsion to listen repeatedly to striking sections of songs — the "Turn it up, here comes my favorite part" — that functions as auditory epoxy just because they never develop by way of the song as a whole.[12]

This same dynamic is apparent in what was, in terms of the song's reception, its most dramatic moment: the audience would scream on hearing the heavy downbeats of the first measure of the second theme ["I'm so glad . . ."]. It is hard to understand the meaning of a scream as a response to music; it is as unlikely as yelling "pretty" at a landscape. In this Beatles' song it is especially hard to make sense of, because there is no important musical event in this measure or the theme it introduces. On the contrary, the bluesy dissonances of the first part are suddenly superseded by completely functional, effectively "white"

12. This section has been based on Adorno's: "On Popular Music," in *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung*, Vol. 9, 1941, especially pp. 17-19.

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classical harmony. Tension is reduced at this point, and not without skill or an eye for the shaping of a contrasting section. The actual compositional standard, however, is evident in the peculiarity that a reduction in tension is met by a scream. Here is the real clue: This scream of surprise is the shock of the familiar in a situation of general disorientation. The power of the passage is its abstract manufacture of recognition. The general uncomposedness of the song is the requirement for the banal force of the heavy down beats, a measure that differs strongly from the rest of the song because it is not thrown off balance by the syncopation. This makes the measure one of those *just for you* passages by which it insists: "This is what we all agree on. Here we all join in."

What the audience joined in on, and what they looked forward to in this theme, is that it is the most infantile section. While it is true that ever since romanticism art has had the responsiblity of defending the childish — in Schumann and Picasso, for example, it is a resource for the rejection of dependency, the conventional and of any constraint on fantasy — in mass culture the infantile returns under the auspices of infantile amnesia and functions as a source for speculating on another's dependency (usually a woman's), rationalization and the constriction of expression. Thus this Beatles' theme barely rocks back and forth through the distance of a major third, sticks close to home, and bears at its high point a gooey-sweet resolution of a suspension on the words, "my little girl." The high point of this theme reverberates with the other high notes throughout the song; they also accent the word "baby" and its rhymed equivalents, which is hardly an exception in lyrics of popular music. "Baby" is, in fact, the one point that this Beatles' song makes on every level, encompassing the stumbling rhythm and clashing sound in its jagged rolypoliness. The powerful adolescent ruse of this music is that it can draw on the external similarity of the infantile and non-conformism in order defensively to provide the infantile with black leather, sun-glasses, and the ready claim to irony that serves — as it served the whole pop-art movement with which the Beatles were allied — as a character mask for the duplicity and self- promotion required for taking ones place in society.

Actual composition, as Adorno frequently wrote, is a problem of following the music where it wants to go, which at the same time means resisting its banal directions. Composition gels when the order of sound appears as if it cannot be other than it is.[13] This bindingness

13. Adorno, "Kriterien der neuen Musik," in *G.S.*, Vol. 16, p. 182.

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can only occur by the individual element becoming more than factual; each element must function as itself and go beyond itself as both the result of the form as well as its negation;[14] it must be a microcosm of the whole and lead to the exposition of the whole.[15] In contrast, the power of popular music to produce a semblance of sociality depends on never achieving this level of composition. Here the detail has no bearing on the whole and remains extraneous to the framework; the whole is not and cannot be altered by the individual event, but remains aloof and unnoticed throughout.[16] If, however, the music were composed, if, for example, Lennon and McCartney's song were actually composed out of the dissonances of the first theme rather than being simply juxtaposed under the subordinating power of the song's repetitiveness, the music would be unable to live parasitically from the anxiety of a false society but would overcome anxiety by giving it expression: an event at which no one would scream.[17]

Musical Souvenirs

Popular listening is determined by the illusory character of the construction of the music. Its form of transcendence is a phobic otherness in which images of the foreign are used to exclude the foreign. The music, in other words, provides a semblance of experience while assuring its impossibility. The point of the final authentic cadences of the Beatles' song has just this sense of insisting that whatever happened never occurred. Listening, therefore, can only be characterized by psychological, not musical, intensities. Whatever claims of devotion to the music are made, there is no vivid perception of the music; rather, the listener is preoccupied with fixed patterns of reaction.[18] This is one reason why the insistence that popular music be studied exclusively according to its reception is necessarily misleading: the power of the music depends upon the failure of actual reception.

The absence of musical experience, of knowledge of the object from

14. *Ibid.*, p. 218.
15. Adorno, "On Popular Music," *op. cit.*
16. *Ibid.*
17. The self that is rigidly preoccupied with holding a barely contained anxiety at bay can only imagine that expression would release an imagined chaos that is both more and much less than the actual state of things. This must explain why people who have never heard any twentieth century music often have a strangely well rehearsed description of the chaotic and terrifying sounds that they imagine they are rationally avoiding.
18. See Otto Fenichel, *The Psychoanalytic Theory of Neurosis* (New York: Norton, 1945), pp. 541-542.

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within, is confirmed by the peculiarity of the way in which popular music is remembered. It is not the music *per se* that comes to mind when the song is replayed, but the memory of when it was heard, the: "That's when I was. . . ." As sociologists David Hatch and Stephen Millward discovered: "We have found during our research . . . that many listeners are uncomfortable with recordings made either before or after the period in which they became familiar with pop music."[19] The music is a small scale souvenir factory; it produces memories that are not qualities of the object itself. The apparently charged memory that snaps on with the tune is a residue of the struggle to absorb the impact of the song's repetitiveness and the constant replaying that compelled its purchase. A sympathetic, yet musically acute listener would be unable to find a trace of the emotional intensity that a fan claims inheres in a favorite old song.

Skittishness and Resentment

Just as a certain breed of Marxist once came down from the mountain to tell the world that it is ruled by money, the characteristic obtuseness of writers on the manipulativeness of mass culture is that they present what is known to everyone as a grave revelation. But the real power of mass culture — that people are moved to act against themselves while fully aware that they are being deceived[20] — is left untouched. This failing is so obvious that a large proportion of mass-culture studies must primarily be a ruse for immersion in it rather than its criticism. The critique of popular music runs that same risk. No one needs to be told why the music plays so loudly in the clothing store. Neither, for that matter, is popular music's deceptive manufacture of memory a secret. Playing an old song may give reassurance that one has lived, but listening to a stack of them underscores what is perceived even back of the reassurance felt in the single song: with each change of the record the contentlessness of the haze that surrounds it is forced on consciousness and compels the recognition that the self is a collage of shock experiences, deprived of any continuity in time.[21] And, as a final example of what every listener in one way or another knows, the prevaricated sexuality is a *quid pro quo* of exhibitionism for fulfillment, and since this illusion of sexuality therefore functions as a defense against itself, it is one of the ways in which

19. Hatch and Millward, *op. cit.*, p. 16.
20. Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, *op. cit.*, p. 167.
21. See Adorno, *Introduction to the Sociology of Music*, trans. by E. B. Ashton (New York: Seabury Press, 1976), p. 186.

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the capacity for pleasure is trained to hate itself.[22]

The legitimacy of enumerating these self-transparent duplicities of popular listening is that it gives some insight into the silent undertow that surrounds the criticism of popular music. People are angry and ready to bolt the instant the topic is critically broached because their anger over what they have had to do to themselves in order to be at one with the music never slips out of consciousness. The sense of self-betrayal stretches back through the whole of a person's attachment to popular music. Any careful review of one's earliest memories of popular music will turn up traces of the initial effort that liking the music required; the initial puzzlement over one's assumed membership in the music, and how this puzzlement was juggled into devotion when it was realized that the music offered the single choice between joining in and isolation.[23] Those devotees of popular music who look hard and still insist on finding no trace of this biographical event reveal more than they admit by reenacting this Ur-event of popular music whenever they lay claim to the most recent musical fashion and spitefully reject the absurdity of the previous one. In this anger, the self tries to take revenge for what was done to it. But, in so far as this anger remains popular anger, it becomes the force of self-subordination to whatever the recording industry has lined-up next.[24]

Not All Popular Music

Writing on popular music, even criticizing it, tends to confirm the one-dimensional musical landscape in its claim to be the musical whole. And in so far as this critique draws on Adorno, it seems to substantiate the stereotype of Adorno — *the* bitten critic of popular music. Everything must refer to popular music. If, however, the critique of popular music is to do something else than help discover new mysteries in the mundane, and end up heroically obeying the limits set by mass culture, the music it excludes must be introduced. This is difficult to do, however, because popular music occupies almost the whole musical sensorium, and there are few musical associations held in common to make such a discussion plausible. But it is in a sense popular music that requires this discussion, because the emphatic music it marginalizes fulfills popular music's own claim to sociality in a way that popular music does not and cannot.

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22. See, Adorno, *In Search of Wagner*, trans. by Rodney Livingstone, (London: NLB, 1981), *op. cit.*, p. 93.
23. See Adorno, "Culture Industry" *op. cit.*
24. See Adorno, "On Popular Music," *op. cit.*, pp. 42-48.

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A wedge can be worked into the false siding of the musical landscape by going beyond the usual limits to the discussion of Adorno's philosophy of music. He was hardly preoccupied with popular music. Though he studied it in detail at one point in his life, in the context of the whole of his work popular music is of almost derivative importance.[25] He wrote multiple pages on Mahler and many other composers for each one he wrote on popular music. Why Adorno spent relatively little time studying this music is the only simple issue in his musicology: the music itself is not interesting. Saying this knowingly courts the fury of popular music which, always the social defender, would rail at the mandarin preference for great art over society. This, however, misunderstands Adorno completely and exactly how needs to be explained in detail if the opposition that his aesthetics presents to the contemporary situation of music is to be developed.

Far from preferring art to society, Adorno held that society can only be experienced in emphatic art. The point of all his writings on art, in fact, is that aesthetic importance is defined by the intensity of its social content. In his musicological writings he developed this idea on the basis of a transformed concept of musical material, which is generally understood in technocratic terms as a completely fungible raw material. Persichetti, for example, opens his well known treatise with a characteristically administrative idea of musical material that reflects the power over musical material that was achieved in this century: "Any tone can succeed any other tone, any tone can sound simultaneously with any other tone or tones, and any group of tones can be followed by any other group of tones, just as any degree of tension or nuance can occur in any medium

25. Out of the dozen books and more than hundred essays Adorno wrote on music, only four essays are on popular music: "On Jazz" (1936), "On the Fetish Character in Music and the Regression of Listening" (1938), "On Popular Music" (1941), and "Jazz: Timeless Fashion" (1953). Beyond these essays, a couple of book reviews and miscellaneous essays, there is the memorandum, "Music in Radio" (1938), an extensive, though unpublished study concerning many dimensions of popular radio listening. It was written as part of the Princeton Radio Research Program. The dates of these works are important because most were written during Adorno's years in America. In contrast, his musicological writings on either side of his stay in this country are relatively limited in their focus on popular music: When Adorno published in 1932 "The Social Situation of Music," which he referred to throughout his life as a complete sketch of a music sociology, the discussion of popular music is brief. And, after he left America, he only gave exclusive treatment to popular music one more time, and then in a single chapter of the *Introduction to the Sociology of Music*, which was finished in the last decade of his life. And, this essay, as he mentions in a note, draws heavily on the English essay "On Popular Music." It is clear that Adorno gave hardly any new thought to popular music after he left America.

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under any kind of stress or duration.[26]

In contrast to this enlightenment concept of musical material as raw material, Adorno has shown that the material itself as a whole expands and contracts and has an historical tendency; every element of a musical composition is social and has a *telos*; form itself is the sedimentation of techniques originating in social life and the social consciousness that historically organized sound cannot be subtracted from any particular chord.

If composition is to succeed, it must compose history from the perspective of the present. This is not to say that composition is a conscious struggle with historical themes. Within the sphere of autonomous music, the material asserts its historical impulse most insistently the more it has lost any direct reference to society and appears virtually as Persichetti described it. This aesthetic sublimation of the explicitly historical quality of sound is a transformation of history into nature, a second nature. As Adorno explains, following out the idea of natural history that is at the center of all his writings,[27] at the moment a chord no longer permits its historical reference to be heard, it demands that the music with which it is being fitted together do justice to its historical implications.[28] Therefore, the more autonomous the construction of music, the more blindly it proceeds with regard to history, the more composition potentially becomes the unconscious writing of history. This transformation of history into the immanent demands of sound is the Hegelian ruse of reason in composition; it is the restriction of composition to the non-intentional.

The ability to proceed blindly, however, and get things right, meaningfully to form what transpires historically, depends on the adequacy of technique. There are several ways of paraphrasing the idea of technique that make what is at stake in the concept apparent: technique is subjectivity, the active principle of identity, as well as the possibility of responding adequately to something or distorting it. Whereas in the empirical struggle for self-preservation technique subordinates its object to a false identity of subject and object, in the autonomous sphere of art, beyond self-preservation, the principle of identity in technique becomes the immanent capacity to follow the movement of the material according to its own dialectic. This dialectic is the antagonistic movement of society. The

26. Vincent Persichetti, *Twentieth Century Harmony* (New York: Norton, 1961), p. 13

27. See, "Introduction to 'The Idea of Natural History'," in *Telos* 60 (Summer 1984), pp. 111-124.

28. Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music, op. cit.*, pp. 32-39.

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adequacy of technique, therefore, is the capacity of the compositional subject to act as the total social subject and, rather than dominate the material, give the antagonistic social whole expression.

This act of expression is more than a factual rendering of the social: following the social material where it tends goes beyond the object by its own force. The measure of a composition's social spontaneity is just its ability to go beyond society by way of the process that makes the social essence appear. The aesthetic *frisson* is a shudder at the disaster that otherwise transpires unperceived. However, this shudder is not an experience of terror but (in so far as it results exclusively from the adequacy of composition) a form of historiography in which the presence of the forgotten and the feeling of "if it only were" are unitary.[29] This is the moment that Benjamin describes as the cairos of dialectic at a standstill. Popular music, in contrast, is just as uninteresting musically as it is socially because, having relinquished the demands of technique, because it is not composed, it is restricted to the *frisson* of the familiar.

Semblance at the Top

If this introduction to the potential sociality of emphatic music makes some sense, it is not intended to be the moment when popular music is pronounced an ideological semblance and classical music dragged out from behind the wings as truth revealed. On the contrary, the Sphinx is right that all art — all music — is semblance, right into its smallest molecule. All classical pianists are aware of the role illusion plays in each legato and come to resent the murky spirit instilled by the sustain pedal. Every classical performer must deal not only with the technical difficulties of varying the character of repeated phrases but also with a degree of disgust for music held together by the simulation of individuality. And, even if one has never laid a finger on the piano, real suspicion must mingle somewhere with the act of setting the needle back to the beginning of a record that a second earlier claimed to be in the process of transforming the universe.

These elements of semblance in so-called classical music are not a haphazard agglomeration of illusions, but rather have a common origin in the development of music as semblance — a semblance that Adorno criticized in ways similar to his critique of popular music. Adorno traces the development of musical semblance from the rise of *musica ficta* in the

29. Adorno discusses tradition as "the presence of the forgotten" in *Philosophy of New Music*. For Adorno's discussion of the aesthetic shudder, see *Aesthetische Theorie* in *G.S.*, Vol. 7, pp. 124-125 and 489-490.

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14th century: the introduction of unwritten chromatic accidentals. This was the mark of incipient freedom in the control of the musical material at the same time that it achieved an early simulation of subjectivity. Throughout its history, the development of musical forces of production served this simulation of subjectivity as the composition of an image of expression.[30] A comparable example of this process of growing control over the material, subjectivization, and semblance was the subordination of the church modes to the major/minor system. This event made modulation possible, the manipulation of whole sections of dissonance, and thereby, for the first time, expression became an element of the total musical structure and with a wholly new force.[31] From the 18th century on this expressive resource was especially utilized for the purpose of the heightening of development, which became the primary device for the objectification of subjectivity in music. But, in so far as modulation and development were subordinate to the structure of the cadence, music remained conventional and an image of expression. Beethoven, as Adorno points out, was bound to semblance just because he could do no more than imitate individual expression through the manipulation of the robotic conventions sedimented in the history of Western music in the process of reason's growing control over the material.[32] This semblance was the limit of classical music's compositional power. And whatever its achievements, Adorno was still intensely critical of it as semblance, going so far as to say that, both as music and expression it was questionable. Like the psychological literature of 19th century realism, only a fictive, stylized subject is expressed.[33]

This is, however, not all there is to say about semblance and classical music. It is, like popular music, semblance in so far as it is conventional rather than composed, but it is also semblance in so far as it is truly composed. And this is the real introduction to the dialectic in which the whole of Adorno's musicology is immersed, which is hardly that of popular music, but rather, the impossibility of music. To the extent that music is composed it lays claim to being an organization of sound existing wholly within itself, within its own internal relations. It thereby gains an illusion of autonomy from the social world out of which it is at every point constructed. Art's autonomy is its real, yet illusory distance from the struggle for self-preservation. This is music's — and all art's —

30. "Klassik, Romantik, neue Musik," in *G.S.*, Vol. 16, pp.126-130.
31. Charles Rosen, *Schoenberg* (New York: Viking Press, 1975), p. 28-29.
32. "Vers une musique informelle," *op. cit.*, p. 324ff.
33. "Die gesellschaftliche Lage der Musik," in *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung*, Vol. 1 (1932), pp. 103-124 and pp. 356-378.

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constitutive semblance and the source of its free radiance as beauty: the substance of its impossibility in the sense of "if it only were." But just this break of art from any social function, which depends on its compositional integrity, once again subordinates art to social functions and to socially necessary semblance. Just by its distance from self-preservation, aesthetic autonomy offers a glow of reconciliation, a claim to universality that makes it the ideal and ready representative of all particular interests. As beauty, art is always ready to bestow the crown of spirit. Here again, the details are too obvious to mention: corporations invest in opera to obscure their rapaciousness; the grand piano in the corner says that money is everything and nothing, as well as blessed; and there is not a line of Beethoven played correctly that does not somehow say: I have been chosen not to get my hands dirty. All art, but most of all classical music, is the spiritualized world of privilege. The American recording industry only continues to produce money-losing classical recordings for the status it accrues even in the eyes of people who would never listen to the recordings.[34] Even as a tax write-off, classical music is no less for sale than popular music, and in this regard more ideological because, unlike popular music, it claims to be beyond all that.

Sphinx and Art Hatred

It is the sphinx's unqualified love of art that reveals its alienness to it.[35] For, in that art's potential to shatter the social facade depends on its constitutive semblance, art is involuntarily allied at every point with ideology. As a result of this antinomy of aesthetic semblance, the more one is interested in art, and hopes from it, the more it is necessary to hate it. This hostility toward aesthetic semblance has been potentiated as the social web has tightened and art's tendency to betray itself has become inescapable. All modern artists have, as a result, had to struggle against the impulse to destroy their work.[36] Francis Bacon, for one,

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34. See Fink, *op. cit.*, p. 24.

35. Other art lovers in the same category are people like Robert Alters in *Pleasures of Reading* and Alvin Kernan in *The Death of Literature* who miss the days when professors taught that literature is nice. They are right that "literary theorists" are obtuse to art, but the obtuseness of the theorists is better founded in the internal dialectic of art than is that of these two critics. The crudeness of Benjamin's *Kunstwerk* essay — which points to an aesthete — is preferable to those perfect literary touches that Alters and Kernan admire.

36. Popular music, with its angry posturing, harmonic reversals, secret lyrics and obscenity also lays claim to the critique of semblance, though without ever wanting to carry it out. This is, as Glenn Gould explained, one of the perfections of popular music: "Each of the songs . . . emphasizes some aspect of that discrepancy between an adolescent's short term need to rebel and long range readiness to conform." *Glenn Gould Reader* (New York: Vintage, 1984) p. 303.

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does destroy all paintings that are not removed from his studio, and particularly the best ones.[37] And modern art's antipathy toward itself not only aims at the destruction of what has been made. Rather, every molecule of semblance is bound to an element antithetically critical of semblance. As a result, in each of the arts, the antinomy of semblance resulted in a crisis of form and the development of art works that attempted to go beyond semblance altogether, from the abstractionist refusal of representation to Strindberg's rejection of the suspense drama, to the dissolution of narrative distance in Faulkner and Kafka.[38]

Anti-Illusionistic Semblance

In music the anti-art, anti-illusion impulse has been an element of its entire history, and especially in the period of the rise of its greatest powers of semblance. This complex, dialectical history needs to presented here if the form of the crisis of semblance in modern music is to be understood as well as how the music that developed out of this crisis in the first part of this century was able to become music that was no longer the semblance of subjectivity.

The rise of semblance in music itself involved the critique of semblance because, unlike semblance in popular music, semblance was a technique for the intensification of compositional self-adequacy. The power of semblance was opposed to semblance because the musical aim was the potentiation of the individual subjectivity of the composition.This anti-semblance element in the rise of musical semblance is demonstrated by the fact that, as the power of semblance increased, semblance itself dissolved. This is apparent in the history of the development section of the sonata. In the sonata, development models subjectivity as the thematic material unfolds into its possibilities and oppositions and then rebuilds itself in an act of confirmation.[39] In the classical sonata this process was restricted to the center section. But, according to its own logic of particularization, development began in the late Beethoven and especially in Brahms to spread through the whole of the sonata form. This anti-illusionistic intention of development, however, began to undermine both the process of development and its power of illusion.

37. See the discussion with David Sylvester in the film, "The Brutality of Fact" BBC, 16 November 1984, which contains some material not found in the interviews published as *The Brutality of Fact*, ed. by David Sylvester (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1988).

38. Adorno discusses Kafka in this regard in *Noten zur Literatur*, "Standort des Erzählers" pp. 41-48. The *Aesthetic Theory* is, as a whole, devoted to the presentation of this antinomy of aesthetic semblance.

39. Adorno, "Kriterien der neuen Musik," *op. cit.*, pp. 184-187.

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For development is such only so long as there is a theme that is distinct from the process of development that it undergoes. Once the work was fully dynamic, however, once it had raised its power of semblance to a maximum, this distinction of theme and development was dissolved along with the possibility of development.

In related ways the whole integrative force of tonality brought about its own destruction through the progressive mastery and disintegration of the potentials of contrast from which tonality derived its semblance of subjectivity. The movement of tonal cadences increasingly sounded merely conventional, arbitrary, and subjectively posited. The further dialectical irony of this history is that, while the dissolution of semblance was the result of the anti-illusory impulse in tonality's development, the more that compositional semblance dissolved, the more illusory composition threatened to become. This is because there was no other way than tonality to establish musical meaning. "All that was left to add to this language was the abortive gesture, the deliberate slackening of discipline, the willingness, in fact, to do for an expressive reason the wrong thing."[40] The process of tonal integration destroyed the conventionality of tonality but at the same time made composition arbitrary.[41] This was the impossibility of music in the first decade of this century.

Expression Without A Glow

The most anti-art composer of the first part of this century — Arnold Schoenberg — is the composer who, to popular ears, seems the most absurd, isolated and arty. But it was Schoenberg who developed a radically social form of composition in which expression is no longer a semblance of subjectivity. At the point that musical enlightenment had dissolved all the conventions of tonality as subjectively posited, and seemed to be on the brink of uncomposability, Schoenberg responded to the freedom of the material that was gained. He mastered the material by virtue of the tendency inherent in it.[42] In musical-historical terms, he did this by unifying the horizontal and vertical dimensions of music,

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40. Gould, *op. cit.*, p. 110.

41. This is the same process that occurred socially. Social integration resulted in the dissolution of conventionally binding relations and the arbitrariness of the constituents of society. See Adorno,"Kriterien der neuen Musik," *op. cit.*, pp. 170-182.

42. Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music*, *op. cit.*, p. 58. Adorno develops this concept of mastery in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* in answering the question of how reason can master its material without losing track of it and, in however sovereign a guise, ultimately succumbing to it? The answer he developed was the "positive concept of enlightenment":

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the polyphony of the fugue and the homophony of the sonata. Schoenberg composed a simultaneity of sounds that was not based on subordination to a tonal center, but rather resulted from the independence of the voices and was therefore at the same time the composition of music's sequentiality. This musical construction, then, is built on a principle of contrast and this principle is at the same time that of the release of the dissonant, expressive force of the material. Musical construction became that of completely individual expression and thereby went beyond the simulation of expression that had been the limit of the whole of traditional music, which remains the boundary of all popular music. In Adorno's words: "The truly revolutionary element in Schoenberg's work is the changed function of musical expression. Passions are no longer simulated, but rather genuine emotions of the unconscious — of shock, of trauma — are registered without disguise."[43] This is not illusionistic, but depositional [*Protokol*] — police blotter — expression, and therefore the first music in which each note must truly be as it is. This transformed musical time. Whereas traditional and popular music remain indifferent to the passage of time because their form is based on repetition, the individuality of Schoenberg's music establishes its identity only as identity in difference. Musical time, therefore, becomes meaningful as the transition to the non-identical. This musical order fulfills the technical potential that society has within reach but denies itself: an order in which difference is free yet binding in its expressiveness.[44]

Impossible Solutions

This is a condensed introduction to the social content of Schoenberg's music. But, by way of conclusion, it should not be imagined that Adorno thought Schoenberg had brought music to its apex, to a moment of perfection that musical history lost track of. On the contrary, every

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reason only achieves mastery that is not self-destructive by fulfilling rather than dominating its material. But how could reason do this? What is the possibility that the principle of identity could follow its material and thereby achieve the non-identical? With this intention, Adorno developed a Hegelian dialectic freed from historical apologetics that would draw on the capacity of that dialectic to know its object from within. It would reveal the impossibility sedimented in every object, and show how this impossibility in the microscopic is that of the antagonistic whole. This dialectic would recover by way of enlightenment, thinkingly, the content that enlightenment excludes in its growing power over nature; it would compel rational change by an exposition of need that is conceptually binding and without compromise. Schoenberg's compositional practice is the aesthetic equivalent of this positive concept of enlightenment. See my "Back to Adorno," in *Telos* 81 (Fall 1989), pp. 5-29.

43. Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music*, *op. cit.*, p.39.

44. *Ibid.*

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impossibility of music is a social impossibility, and however music succeeds in solving any of its socially coded problems, the result must be new impossibilities so long as society itself is antagonistic. As Adorno wrote of Schoenberg's critique of musical semblance, this act could still not overcome the limit imposed on every artist's power, which is that it is an aesthetic power and thus bound to semblance because it cannot carry out the social transformation it implies. Therefore, however anti-auratic its expressiveness, its social content, by which it goes beyond society, is once again aura and semblance, by which the composition is potentially neutralized. In all of his musicological writings, Adorno pursued the presentation of every such aporia that developed out of Schoenberg's achievement, tried to demonstrate the social content of these aporia and to find ways in which a binding music could still be composed. He never, in any of this, thought of going back to Schoenberg, which would make no sense at all. Just as in the *Aesthetic Theory* he wrote that nature does not yet exist, and that *Geist* does not yet exist, in a late major essay he wrote: "That which the great composers of the Vienna School, from Haydn to Schubert wanted — a music that was wholly formed, completely correct, completely binding and yet at the same time in every moment completely subject — has to this day still not been able to find its voice."[45]

This desideratum of a fully composed, binding expressive voice has taken on a laughable quality as expression itself has become impossible. No expression could be true if subjectivity is so overwhelmed that none is possible.[46] This aporia of expression has pulled the entire history of art into its vortex, and a great deal that not so long ago was of the greatest importance is coming to look absurd as a result. These works may be beyond any plausible defense. But at least it should be possible to pull popular music into the same anti-illusionistic vortex by recognizing the social content of its compositional form: just as each note in it is subordinated to a whole that is indifferent to it, without recourse to expression and without any internal necessity other than the degree to which it is rudimentarily dominated, the society that it legitimates and cloaks is one in which everyone is one too many.

45. Adorno, "Klassik, Romantik, neue Musik," *G.S.*, Vol. 16, p. 141.
46. Adorno, "Vers une musique informelle," *G.S.*, Vo. 16, p. 537.

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The Unhappy Marriage of Music and Emancipation: Reply to Kentor

Florindo Volpacchio

Kentor's elaboration of Adorno's analysis of popular music leads to the standard conclusion that popular music lacks any redemptive value. He assumes that today functional tonality, with its tendency to resolve harmonic conflicts, feeds into the logic of integration of the culture industry.[1] Presumably, in a fractured world, only music that consciously eschews this harmonic resolution can grasp the predominant social contradictions and thus qualify as music *qua* art, both by critically articulating these objective contradictions and, in refusing to resolve them in a familiar cadenza, point to the unfulfilled longing for emancipation *qua* mimetic reconciliation. Even if some art works were to succeed in achieving aesthetic status in Adorno's sense, it could not possibly have the originally projected emancipatory impact, since every possible aesthetic product can be eventually integrated by the culture industry. Thus Kentor ends up in a paradoxical predicament: if *any* redemption is impossible within popular music because of its unavoidable integration within a conformist culture, why attempt to discover any underlying aesthetic discordance by showing parallels between an almost 30 year old Beatles' song and Schoenbergian innovations in modern music? Such discordances will always capitulate to some eventual forced reconciliation. This is precisely what results from Kentor's analysis of the Beatle's song's compositional failure to fulfill its promise.

1. The music business' first real effort to create a mass market actually began with the attempt to popularize classical music through the radio. See, for example, RCA's attempt to turn Toscanini into an American cultural god in Joseph Horowitz, *Understanding Toscanini* (New York: Knopf, 1987).

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That popular music operates as part of mass culture is hardly news. Neither is it an insight to discover that most popular music, even as it entertains, communicates, or provides some personal catharsis, is driven by commercial aims. Thus, in examining "I Feel Fine" to make his case, Kentor sets up a straw man. Rather than confronting the more challenging claims of some of the later Beatle songs to transcend merely commercial intentions, he chooses a song that was only released as a single in order to keep the Beatles commercially viable during a time when pop acts were especially evanescent. To examine the composition for discordant harmonies, therefore, is the academic equivalent of the teenager who plays records backwards searching for masked messages. His criticisms that the form should not be taken seriously fails to address the real issue: how can transitory and ephemeral products meant for pleasure and entertainment transcend their purely functional purpose to acquire autonomous qualities that become part of the acculturation process? This requires an understanding not only of the aesthetic character of a song, but also its wider reception by a mass audience.

Kentor's focus on text and theory as the objects of music, instead of music-making, leads him to presume that the conformism of popular music is a function of the harmonic character of the music itself. Therefore, his analysis begins with the assumption of a general homogenizing tendency in advanced capitalism. Yet whether or not popular music can resist the homogenization of consumer culture cannot be addressed on an aesthetic level. It is difficult for contemporary popular music to stand as an art form because of the widespread belief that anyone can pick up a guitar and play.[2] What must be examined, then, are the ways it is performed and received by an audience, which is more conscious of the commercial character of popular music than Kentor is willing to admit. The development of rock music in particular (today, clearly the most familiar form of popular music) is mostly a matter of its constant cross-fertilization with other styles or its return to the basic primitivism of "garage bands" and folk roots.

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2. Cf. Carl Dalhaus, "Plea for a Romantic Category: The Concept of the Work of Art in the Newest Music," in *Schoenberg and the New Music*, trans. by D. Puffett and A. Clayton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), pp. 210-19. Dalhaus discusses how the increasing tendency in post-serial music to emphasize the importance of music-making, that is, the performance of music as opposed to its preservation in writing, abandons the notion of music as a work of art. The same can be said for most popular music. Rock music especially abandons any pretext to composition and relies entirely on music-making or playing to compose and pass on its songs. The qualities of the song and its permanency reside not in musical notation, as Kentor presumes, but in the recording.

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These bursts of crude spontaneity lead to frequent phases of diversification and sophisticated musical departures, which make it impossible to categorize popular music solely on the basis of the music itself. Furthermore, this evolution must be understood as much with regard to technological developments in electronic instruments, studio production processes and marketing strategies as to developments in styles.[3] The social absorption of popular music, then, emerges not from the structure of its notes and harmonies, nor from its role as an agency of homogenization of otherwise unruly and potentially disruptive popular masses — something always hovering in the background of Adorno's writings concerning the culture industry — but from the way music is produced and marketed as a commodity among others. To understand popular music requires an examination of the role it plays within the culture industry.

The differentiation of the market machinery has been accompanied by a greater centralization of the various cultural industries, including the music industry. A few large corporations now oversee a growing diversity of recording artists. The resulting culture of consumption no longer leads to the enforcement of generic products in the service of homogeneity. Instead, it has allowed for both the integration of fragmented consumers and a greater differentiation of cultural products. Today, commercial culture has differentiated its audience, individualized consumption, and removed the distinction between esoteric and familiar products. Capitalism now can function effectively by constantly reintegrating these otherwise autonomous agencies of diversification and particularization. The "pluralism" of modernity or of post-modernity translates into opportunities to market and commodify new trends.[4]

Even if the aesthetic dimension still made a difference, the way popular music is technologically produced rules out the possibility of retaining the musical elements which traditionally identified music as a work of art.[5] Popular music today is manufactured and reproduced as recorded music. The composition and identification of a specific song has

3. See Evan Eisenberg, *The Recording Angel: Explorations in Phonography* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1987). For the influence technology has had on all music, see Robert P. Morgan, *Twentieth Century Music* (New York: Norton, 1990), pp. 461-80.

4. The "pluralism" evident in popular music today corresponds to the "pluralism" evident in art music. In both cases, this has produced a lack of musical direction and the loss of musical culture. As Morgan points out, diverse musical trends no longer feel the need to challenge any dominant aesthetic value to establish themselves for there is no dominant aesthetic value. All can be accommodated. Cf. Morgan, *Ibid.*, pp. 481-89.

5. Cf. Dalhaus, "Plea for a Romantic Category: The Concept of the Work of Art in the Newest Music," *op. cit.*

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become inseparable from its specific performance on a recording.[6] Given the efforts that go into the commercial production of a piece of popular music, the recorded studio version becomes the definitive objective representation of that work. Adorno emphasized the difference between reading a musical score and hearing a performance. He warned against the cathartic power of performance as against the distancing power of the abstract musical text. Today, with "performance" replaced by "recording," every bit of contingency, disruption, and decay can be hygienically removed and the product more precisely marketed and thus its social impact more rationally managed.[7] This "performance" consists of overdubs, multi-track layering, and other technical enhancements which redefine the "sound" of the piece. This is not just the electronic version of orchestration. Unlike the traditional orchestrator, the producer records the different parts separately on different tracks and then mixes these layers onto a master version which reflects his particular idea of how the song should sound. When music is "performed" in such a way, musicians no longer interact and listen to each other as they would during a live performance. Now it is the producer who functions as the conductor in the recording studio, dubbing and mixing the different parts

6. If the Beatles can lay claim to any innovation, it lies not in the pseudo-Schoenbergian elements which Kentor finds in the first verse of "I Feel Fine," but in the legitimacy they provided to the recording studio as the primary, if not sole, means of musical expression, especially after they stopped performing live in the mid-1960s. Yet this development was not limited to popular music. It is ironic that Kentor cites Glenn Gould as a critic of rock music, since he pursued a similar path in his classical music career after he ended his live performances in the early 1960s. He too concentrated his efforts on the production of "perfect" performances of classical works through the editing process of the recording studio. His long-time producer, Andrew Kazdin, has just written that Gould at times would not play repeats when recording a work; the first go-through would simply be edited into the performance where the score called for a repeat. The repeat, therefore, was literally a repeat. This eliminated the likelihood of differences within performances of the same passages. See Andrew Kazdin, *Glenn Gould at Work: Creative Lying* (New York: Dutton, 1989). For Kazdin, this has deep philosophical ramifications for it raises the issue of whether such techniques betray the work of art: "Now the controversial aspect of the practice is that some musicians feel that even though the composer has asked the performer to repeat, identically, a number of measures in his composition, in fact — musicians not being automatons — there will be subtle differences in the way the reiteration will sound when compared to the first reading. The argument is that if the tape editor regenerates one of these performances and uses it both times, he will have created two playings so identical that the human variation (a 'plus' in these musicians' world) will be absent and the entire effect will be inferior. Glenn, by the way, did not feel this way at all and in certain Bach dance movements would not even bother to record the 'repeat.' He knew from the start that he wanted the two performances to be as identical as possible, a goal perfectly achieved by regeneration" (pp. 64-5).

7. See Mary Harron, "Pop as a Commodity" in *Facing the Music*, ed. by Simon Frith (New York: Pantheon, 1988), pp. 173-220.

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to construct a musical relation that fits his idea of the intended audience. The possibility that one musician may be inspired by the performance of another musician or the work as a whole is lost. In the case of more established and older recording artists, this process now allows them to return to their original records and re-edit the tapes according to their original intentions (often compromised by the dictates of record companies) or update them for a new audience. This process not only has opened up a whole new enterprise in the revision of pop classics, but also allows the constant re-mixing of old songs to meet the tastes of modern audiences. Pop music, then, never ages. Technology has assured it of a transgenerational appeal that goes beyond Kentor's explanations.

The advances in recording and playback technology, as well as the use of electronics in all forms of musical performances, has also produced a population increasingly unable to differentiate between live and recorded sound. The immediacy which 19th century aficionados and dilettantes had with music through their own ability to play an instrument and perform at home is lost. Now, with the development of digital technology and audio processors, it is not only possible to reproduce the actual tonal and dynamic ranges of performing groups in one's own home, but also the exact acoustics of clubs, concert halls, churches and sports arenas (where most major popular music events take place these days). In addition, the more pre-recorded music and high-tech sound systems are used in "live" situations, the more difficult it is to identify any difference between the listening experience of a live performance and pre-recorded music. In fact, with the proper mixing equipment, one can also become the concert sound man in one's own home, modifying and editing the "performance" on the recording to fit one's particular tastes. Thus any diversification or discordance which may emerge, even in recorded music, is increasingly being mediated by advances in technologies, both in the music studio, through the increasing elimination of the mediating role of the performing artist in the musical work as a whole, and in the home, through the increasing developments of playback technology which allows the listener to control or dismiss any immediately distasteful effect or enhance a particular quality. If Kentor identifies the "impossibility of music" with its having become a "second nature," which makes it a cultural artifact, this artifice is increasingly being separated from composition itself by recording technology. Thus Kentor's examination of an audience reaction to the Beatles' song not only bears no relation to the way most people have heard the song, it presumes a non-existent immediacy with the music.

What all this leads to is that the culture industry now functions wholly

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independently of the aesthetic dimension which Kentor wants to recover and preserve. Aesthetic recovery is no longer a political strategy. There is no internal musical style, dissonance, tonal contingency, or momentary musical aberration which can serve as a hidden resistance within this dimension. Resistance to commodification within popular music is no longer feared by a culture industry that has learned to market such resistance as a profitable commodity.[8] Despite Kentor's lamentations at the end of his piece, the very notion that the aesthetic dimension can recover an emancipatory element from current alienation, perpetuates an obsolete picture of resistance. The distinction he maintains between the aesthetic and commercial (allowing him to seek out in music the dissonant harmonies which can somehow disrupt the conformist tendencies of the culture industry) ignores the changed nature of the entire musical experience.

In light of current technologies, music has simply been reduced to another form of information carrying the messages of commercial products. Can music prevent total commodification? It definitely cannot without at the same time losing all aesthetic pretenses. It is impossible to simultaneously resist commodification while remaining art. As Dalhaus has argued, for music to become a work of art, it needs to be objectified in something permanent to allow it some identifiable autonomy from human mediation.[9] But every attempt to objectify a work today immediately makes it susceptible to cultural reproduction. Despite what one may think of today's art music scene, this is why there is an increasing tendency towards performance art — a form striving to avoid any possibility of consistency and permanence. Thus the implication of Kentor's search for an emancipatory music is that, since it is impossible for music to resist commodification, rather than abolish music as art, we should abolish political and social evaluations of music.

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8. For a definitive example of this, see Greil Marcus' study of the Sex Pistols, *Lipstick Traces* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989).

9. Cf. Dalhaus, "Plea for a Romantic Category: The Concept of the Work of Art in the Newest Music," *op. cit.*, pp. 210-19.

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*The Mother of All Interviews: Zappa on Music and Society**

Florindo Volpacchio

Frank Zappa has always pushed the boundaries of what is musically acceptable. Though influenced by Varèse and Stravinsky, his disdain for the way music is accommodated in contemporary culture and his desire to address it with satire, humor, parody, and a sardonic wit is reminiscent of Satie. The following discussion begins with the problem of modernism in music, but it immediately moves on to the issues of the culture industry.

Volpacchio: I would like to begin by asking what you think of Adorno's music.[1]

Zappa: [The music] sounds like what happens if you tried to write something just like Webern and filled in all the empty spaces. Some of the things I liked, but I liked them because they reminded me of Webern. The choral piece was son of *Das Augenlicht* and there is an orchestral piece in there that sounds like it could have been from Webern's Five Orchestral Pieces. The piece I liked the best was the most old fashioned one, the tonal chromatic piece. It sounds more like

* [Ed.] Those readers who suspect that this title has something to do with Saddam Hussein should recall Frank Zappa's old band, "The Mothers of Invention."

1. Recordings of Zwei Stücke für Streichquartett, op. 2 (1925/26); Sechs kurze Orchesterstücke, op. 4 (1929); Drei Gedichte von Theodor Däubler für vierstimmigen Frauenchor a capella (1929-1945); Zwei Lieder mit Orchester aus dem geplanten Singspiel "Der Schatz des Indianer-Joe" nach Mark Twain (1932/33); "Kinderjahr," Sechs Stücke aus op. 68 von Robert Schumann für kleines Örchester gesetzt (1941), in *Kompositionen* (Wergo, 1990).

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what Wagner would have sounded like if he knew what he was doing. It reminded me of a cross between Wagner and Fauré. The other stuff seems to be aesthetically in the region of Webern's aesthetic with the aroma of Berg minus the turgid flux. You can think of it as enjoyable Schoenberg. But it did not come off to me as scholastic.

I thought there was a Webern aesthetic, harmonically and melodically [in most of the music]. But the thing that wasn't Webern was how it filled up all the spaces. I did not hear any forward looking compositional ideas there because everything that I had heard, with the exception of the earliest — I presume it was the earliest — piece, the one that was the most melodic, were all things I had heard in one form or another in the music of the Viennese School. If I had more familiarity with the music of Schoenberg, I could probably point out the names of the pieces that sounded like they were clones. I am more familiar with all the Webern pieces, and I just heard a lot of things in there that sounded very derivative of Webern. I don't know who did the work first.

Volpacchio: Speaking of the Viennese school, do you see the collapse of functional tonality and common time to be the single most important development in modern music?

Zappa: No. The single most important development in modern music is making a business out of it. . . . You have reached the point where you can't just sit down and write because you know how to write and you love to write and eventually somebody will listen because they love to listen and maybe somebody will play it because they'll want to play it. That is gone. The point where anybody who composes has to deal with the mechanics of the performance world, especially as it is characterized in American society, has to have a major impact on what you write. For example, one of my pet theories is that the leading cause of Minimalism is reduced budgets for rehearsal and reduced budgets for ensemble size. If a guy wants to write something and he knows that there are only a couple of minutes available for rehearsal, there is no way that he is going to write some massive thing for an orchestra. There is no incentive to do it because it will never be performed and it will never be rehearsed. . . . How can a person be concerned about atonality versus tonality when the real question is how do you get anything played. Whatever it is.

Volpacchio: You've always favored Stravinsky and Varèse as more interesting sources for the development of modern music. Why have

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you preferred the French developments in modern music over those of the Germans?

Zappa: Well you see, that's not the point. You talk about development as if a person has to abandon the way things ordinarily sound in order to think it has been developed. I think that if you write music, you should write for your own taste, whatever you like to hear and whatever style you want to write it in for whatever reason. It is a matter of expression, rather than a matter of living and dying by a certain popular style whatever that style is. . . . The twelve tone school at one point was a popular style up until there was a change in funding at the university level for different types of composition. I refer back to this anecdote that I heard about a guy from [one of the foundations] saying, we no longer fund . . . that whole post-Webernian school of composers who were doing all kinds of serial experimentation. That was the approved method of expression in the academic world. Suddenly they stopped funding that and started funding Minimalism. And this was an anecdote that I heard around 1983 when I gave an address to the American Society of University Composers. So it did become a trend and it did become a style. And let's say a person wanted to write completely melodic music, while at the time twelve tone style was all that was being funded and all that was being accepted as serious modern music, then people would laugh at you if your composition could be hummed or remembered.

Volpacchio: But don't you think that this is also due to the change in the audiences?

Zappa: Yes. They get smaller.

Volpacchio: But they have not with Minimalism.

Zappa: Well, Minimalism is a different story because its hard to imagine Schoenberg doing an add for Dewar's scotch. Minimalism, I think, is a perfect form of music to express the spiritual condition of the 80s.

Volpacchio: Yet, Minimalism sees itself as a form of music which includes eclectic, popular elements recognizable by an audience as a necessary response to the abstractness of modernism. Consequently, the music is more approachable.

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Zappa: There is a certain merit to that argument. But then on the other hand, if that's true then all they are doing is helping to create the wallpaper to the contemporary lifestyle. There is a certain function to it. But it is really not an integral part of the fabric of contemporary American life. Its the only way in which a composer can function in contemporary American life at all, that is to do this shallow, empty, repetitive, disposable stuff, and then verify it or rationalize it by saying that is the way the society is and we poor composers can only reflect the way the society is. There is a certain amount of truth to that, but then on the other hand, why the fuck bother to listen to it.

Volpacchio: When you can hear, let's say, a Rolling Stones song promoting a commercial product, what does that say about the inherent properties of modern composition or songwriting if music can be appropriated for such ends?

Zappa: Well, if you think of a Rolling Stones song as a modern composition, you could bemoan the fact that it winds up being used in a commercial. But I believe that at the time most of that material was manufactured, the goal was to make money not to create an anthem for a generation. I am making a distinction between the rock n' roll and the so-called contemporary art music. You would have to be a lunatic to think you could make money from doing the contemporary art music no matter what style you were writing in.

Volpacchio: Yet in your music, despite the overlapping influences, you do consciously maintain a separation of styles and musical forms. Do you see a distinction between high and low art?

Zappa: Or any art at all?

Volpacchio: However, with the increasing appropriation of elements, if not outright songs, of popular music by the "serious" music world, is rock n' roll the new classicism?

Zappa: No. My recollection of the development of the history of rock n' roll music is that from the point where the songs were being performed by young performers — note, not old blues singers or jazz musicians — teenagers started doing it and recording it. Basically, they did a bunch of songs about their girl friends. And that was fairly

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real. That was the early days of doo-wop music. And from then on they started getting corporate assistance, first from the guys with the cigars sticking out of their mouths in the Brill Building who said, hey I could write one of those. They realized that the biggest profit from a record is in the writing and publishing. You started seeing more of a business involvement of people who really didn't care about a song about . . . fill the girl's name in the blank for the title of the song. It was just, o.k, I know what the style is and because I am a professional songwriter I can do this. This eventually turned into corporate rock. So, there is nothing classic about that as far as I am concerned. It is certainly valid and consumable lifestyle material and certainly reflects what is going on in the society — good, bad, and indifferent — the message is tucked away in the music. The goal of creating that kind of material is to make product, not to do composition. I always make a distinction between songwriters and composers.

Volpacchio: There are those who feel rock music offers an opportunity for undermining the consumer culture.

Zappa: I don't buy that. The reason I don't buy it is because at its best, rock music is a folk art form when it comes directly from the people who may know how to play one or two songs on their instruments and those one or two songs mean something to the people who wrote them and sing them.

Volpacchio: Are you referring to the Bob Dylans of the world?

Zappa: That's on a more sophisticated level. I'm talking about Cannibal and the Headhunters, little one shot groups . . . the guys who got together who really are not looking forward to a long-term career. But they have that one song that is their song, and they are into it, and they play it for all its worth. And it is their personal expression of how they feel at the time they managed by some miracle to get their song on a record. That is when rock is really doing its job. It is kind of a democratic art form because it lets people who are not certified as musicians or composers or songwriters to sneak in there and say something. But things like that are more and more rare.

Volpacchio: However, the point I would like to make is that, despite the intentions of the guys who create the product, it appears that the music

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for the audience at least often carries more of a message than may ever have been intended. Isn't this how a song becomes the anthem of a generation? Isn't this what really differentiates rock music from other forms of popular music, the ability to somehow mystically capture the experience of a generation regardless of what may have inspired the song? Even more to the point, if you take the example of the Sex Pistols. . .

Zappa: They were manufactured.

Volpacchio: Yes, they are a prime example of a band put together to exploit the counterculture market of the music business. Yet, ironically, they were a serious inspiration for a new generation of rock musicians and audiences who saw in them precisely the potential of rock to challenge the corporate culture that had absolutely appropriated rock by the mid-1970s.

Zappa: Great, hum me one of their songs. Are we talking about music or are we talking about sociology? Basically, what you are describing to me is a commercial game which has been played. As far as I am concerned, this has nothing to do with music. I am glad that someone sneaks in there and makes a mockery of the business. But how much of a mockery is it if they wind up being sold and distributed by the same business that they intend to mock?

Volpacchio: But doesn't the business need these types of bands to allow it to identify where the new markets are for the next generation it wants to commercially colonize?

Zappa: No major school of rock music ever occurred without being able to dress up to it. In other words, you can't have a trend in music, as far as pop music goes, unless there is a costume that you can wear that goes along with it, that lets the consumer participate in the fantasy. So that is really when you're talking about looking for a market. If a new group comes along, in order for it to be a really mega, mega group, there has to be some way to either imitate their hair-do or imitate their clothes. It has nothing to do with the music. This is the marketing aspect of it. The companies are not going to invest heavily to promote a group just because they sing well, play well, write well. The bucks are going to go into that group when somebody in an office sniffs the possibility of co-operative advertising and co-operative promotions

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with soft drinks, with alcoholic beverages, with clothing manufacturers, with shoe manufacturers, with jewelry manufacturers . . .

Volpacchio: Do you see this as the attempt by the business to exploit the absolute identification of the consumer with his product?

Zappa: I am sure that is in the back of the mind of just about everybody who makes a product. They are either going to do it through some kind of star endorsement or find some other way to tie their product more intimately to the popular culture. Because if it is involved with the culture, it gives the illusion that the product itself has a more exalted, inherent value if it is something that functions in the culture. Coca-Cola is the best example. Basically, it is carbonated brown water as far as I am concerned. But the way in which it has become intertwined with the American flag and every other thing . . . For example, I was flipping through C-SPAN yesterday, and they had a round table discussion about the base closings. The guy who is head of this organization dealing with base closings, his last job was head of the national soft drink manufacturers association. And the fellow who introduced him made the comment that, well no matter what happens in terms of closing these bases, I am sure that they will always be selling Coke and Pepsi at them. It was sort of meant to be a joke, but that's kind of the way it is, no matter what happens economically and otherwise in this country. If you want to really have something for the country to rally around, there is always that soft drink industry.

Volpacchio: Do you really believe the songs themselves help sell the products? Or is that just a fantasy among advertisers?

Zappa: I think that it works two ways. There may be some boost in sales when, for example, Michael Jackson did the two minute commercial in the middle of the Grammies a few years ago. These kinds of things may give a little boost in sales. But one of the reasons these kinds of companies especially have to tie themselves to pop culture is they need some reason to exist . . . to identify with whatever is contemporary.

Volpacchio: What you are saying then is that the only way you can sell something is by being thought to be hip and modern, which is very much associated with American culture.

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Zappa: Right. You tie your product to the latest rock video act, you sponsor that act's tour, you put your signs up all over the place when that act comes to town. Its not just that the act has appeared in your commercial on television; the act winds up being a salesman for your product everyplace it goes. The problem with that is the shelf life of the contemporary rock music act is not that long, so that they are going to be constantly searching for new things to identify with.

Volpacchio: Is this affecting the way new acts break into the business?

Zappa: I don't think that it is possible to function as a real touring artist in the music business today without some sort of corporate sponsorship because the costs are so high. The only way you can expect to make a profit on a tour is to have that subsidization.

Volpacchio: This also brings up the question of live performances versus recorded performances. Most popular music acts today appear to function primarily in the studio, and the live performances attempt to reproduce the recorded performance. There is less spontaneity and improvisation, not to mention the sense of musicianship necessary to perform before a live audience. In short, live performances also appear to be more and more programmed. Do you attribute this to the way audiences have become acculturated to music primarily through recordings?

Zappa: It is the groups' fault. You can't blame this on the audiences. Ultimately, it is their music and their reputation. They are not slaves. It is a conscious decision on the part of the groups to go out and do this.

Volpacchio: Don't producers though play a large influence on how music gets recorded?

Zappa: But producers have nothing to do with the live performance situation.

Volpacchio: Yet, if a touring group wants to make an audience happy, and the best way to achieve this is by reproducing something familiar, and this means reproducing the familiarity of the recording as shaped by the producer. . .

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Zappa: Well, let us take a look at the original recording. Is it a work of art or is it a piece of product? If it is a product, then what do you do? You are out there to sell the product. So, naturally you will want to replicate the product. You go out and be a jukebox.

Volpacchio: But the way that product been produced in the recording studio has also affected the way people listen to music.

Zappa: The way people listen to music has more to do with MTV than it does with the producers. Part of the problem when you are doing the live performance is that you will never look as good as your video, unless your video is some exalted version of a live performance and you take the same 10,000 lamp rig on the road with you and do all that stuff. At that point you can't afford to do it unless you are subsidized. All of the so-called concept videos, there is no way to replicate that aroma on stage. Its still basically just a band and some amplifiers, unless you are going to spend a lot of money on sets. The people who engage in this kind of business practice — designing audio products for sale and then promoting it with replications that are as close to the original product as possible — they do not have any qualms about going out there and lipsynching.

Volpacchio: But have you not commented elsewhere on how difficult it is to play instrumental music because of the audiences' declining attention span?

Zappa: It's only going to get worse if you don't try to give the audience something different to listen to. But remember, there is not just one, monolithic audience out there. And if your product has been brought to an audience's attention on MTV, then the people who live the MTV lifestyle will come to that concert and I will guarantee you they want to see no improvisation, they want to hear no deviation from the original arrangement. They are perfectly satisfied to see people lipsynching and dancing a lot on stage. But that tends to be a younger audience.

Volpacchio: But even older audiences want no surprises, not to mention new music, when they go to a concert. And I am sure that has to do with the fact that concert halls have to fill seats.

Zappa: The other thing that bears on that is the action of unions. When the production cost of a concert is escalated to fantasy realms by union

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costs, it severely limits the types of performances that you can mount because you are obliged to sell all the seats just to pay your costs.

Volpacchio: It is very difficult then for anyone who is composing new music to find any way of putting it on stage.

Zappa: Sure. Suppose you are Joe Blow, the composer, and you get a revolutionary idea. What are you going to do with it?

Volpacchio: But there have always been alternative places for artists to expose their work. Don't these provide an outlet for new ideas?

Zappa: The symphony orchestra?

Volpacchio: Granted, they don't provide an outlet for symphonic works.

Zappa: But there, we are getting right to the nub of it. The symphony orchestra is a magnificent instrument and that repertoire, in an ideal world, should grow. And orchestral repertoire should reflect the contemporary life, rather than small groups of people who play endless, repeated patterns. Part of the problem is not just the stagehands' union, it is the musicians' union. Composers don't have a union. Nobody looks out for their interest. At the point where a composer has to get something performed, he is at the mercy of the copyists — who are part of the musicians union — and the musicians themselves. The guy who actually took the time to write the music will probably wind up making less from its performance than the guy who moved the chairs for the string quartet. If he is going to stay alive, he has to have a part-time job . . . something grim, like maybe being a professor. Then everybody goes through this fucking charade for an audience that is not there, an audience that would rather see Vanilla Ice.

Volpacchio: Speaking of Vanilla Ice, how do you explain his success?

Zappa: First of all, I am not sure that the sales figures are accurate. I believe he is an endorsee of one of those soft drink products. And I think that once you are hooked up with one of those endorsements, it is very easy for people to exaggerate sales because a company would not want to have an endorsement relationship with somebody who was not platinum at some level.

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Volpacchio: Rap music seems to be a music form that arises totally out of pre-recorded elements. What do you see going on there musically and what has brought it the popularity it has now attained?

Zappa: Rap, I don't believe, could have existed without two or three decades of conditioning through commercials.

Volpacchio: Do you think it is a product of watching too much television?

Zappa: Well, it is just my first instinctual reaction to it. Also, it's all we have left of poetry in America. . . . All we have left of visual arts is commercials. A lot of the people who are directors of commercials are the most sought after people to direct rock videos, who then become the most sought after young talents to make feature films.

Volpacchio: Do you think Madison Avenue is totally able to manipulate our needs or have people now become so cynical that this very cynicism is all that remains of independent judgment?

Zappa: There is no 100%. Let us just say that the ability of Madison Avenue to persuade people will rise proportionately as the educational system deteriorates.

Volpacchio: But the inability to make ethical and moral decisions can't just be traced to the decline of the American educational system?

Zappa: They have all broken down because in order to have a reasonable standard of living, it is impossible — unless Dad is a drug pusher — to earn enough money in a two parent family just holding a normal job without both parents working. When both parents are out working, who is taking care of the kids . . . the TV set. And then the kid does not do any work in school . . . of course there is no work to do, and the school is for shit, and it is such a physically abysmal place to be sitting in for six to eight hours a day, and everything that you see on television leads you away from any hint of intellectual development. This is the subtext of all the commercials. There is a radio commercial running here in California. In it people are sitting around talking about a mathematical problem, and they are having trouble with it. One of the young people in this commercial goes, why think? This is a beer commercial, so its subtext is why think when you can drink.

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Volpacchio: Is the problem of the culture industry inherently and predominantly an urban one?

Zappa: It is for a moment. Network television purports to create a type of entertainment which should be acceptable and even enjoyable to people in the heartland. This is all concocted for people in the heartland by people in urban centers who hate the people who live in the heartland, have no regard for them whatsoever, and think of them as bumpkins. Furthermore, on the days when they have to make these decisions to provide entertainment for people in the heartland, these same denizens are struggling for their own existence in a highly competitive environment in these major urban centers. Basically, they have mutated themselves. And because they have this type of a job, all their bad mental health is inflicted on the rest of the population through that medium. Their idea of what is beautiful. . . their idea of what is valuable. . . their idea of what is exciting. . . their idea of what is news. . . everything is strained through the mentality of these people in these urban centers. The little guy out there in the heartland, he does not have a chance.

Volpacchio: But even those places in the heartland — the sources of American populism that used to try to resist the control of the urban centers — even they appear to have succumbed to tastes that are shaped outside of their communities. Is there any heritage and tradition left in these communities?

Zappa: There is a heritage. . . it is dwindling. There are traditions. . . they are vanishing. But there are also aspirations, and the aspirations unfortunately seem to lead these people in the direction of the behavior of their brethren in the major metropolitan areas. Figure it out. You live on the farm . . . you're in the Midwest . . . you're in the heartland . . . and you like Madonna? Why? What can that possibly mean? Well, it is a symbol of excitement. It is a symbol of what you do not have where you live. And now how are you going to attain it? By modifying your heartland community to a place where you can one day sprout your own Madonna? Or do you just — as soon as you get to be old enough to travel — go to where those Madonna people are so you can participate in it?

Volpacchio: However, these heartland communities have also had a checkered past. Many people point to these communities as being the

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source of American racism and ethnic hatred in their desire to be closed, homogenous communities.

Zappa: Not to the degree that they are any better or any worse than what goes on in the metropolitan areas. The only difference is that in the metropolitan areas, there is more media, people making speeches. . . there is more hypocrisy. Its the same racism.

Volpacchio: Do you see racism as being the greatest problem facing this country today? Is this the same racism that has always existed in the culture or is it a new strain?

Zappa: It is a problem, but it is certainly part of the raw material of the American society. I think you've got the pigmentation racism . . . you've got the class- based racism . . . and you've got a kind of politically based racism too. And one of the things that, if you're trying to arrive at an assessment of whether or not the American strain of racism is more virulent than in other societies, you might point out that we probably have more racists rubbing up against each other in this country than people in other countries. There are more people to hate. I remember when they first tried to promote the idea of brotherhood week and all the rest of this stuff in the 50s. It didn't last very long . . . It was one of those kind of promo concepts that they didn't keep going with it because there seemed to be no real reason to. . . . Why bother to bend over backwards to have anything that resembles brotherhood when after the Reagan administration years it was officially announced by the government that greed is good? Well, if the government says so, then why do I need to look out for anybody else when the most important thing on the planet to do is to look out for yourself?

Volpacchio: Thank you for this interview.[2]

2. This telephone interview was conducted on May 16, 1991. Frank Zappa has recently announced his candidacy for the presidency of the United States.

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Polemics:

*Theory of the Future**

Robert Hullot-Kentor

It is easy to sympathize with the contemporary urge to be *post* something. But if the affix is to have historical cogency, it must be restricted to: Post Late-Capitalism. We are back to that beginning, where the pristine blossoms with a stale exhalation. This is why the conference question — "Does Critical Theory Have A Future?" — seems so weirdly chipper: as if the Future were straight ahead and doubt overshadows just this one paper boat — Critical Theory — as it sails out of pre-war Germany onto the high seas of all time-to-come. Will Critical Theory make it? Probably not, it is implied. So far as this Future is concerned, leaving everything behind, stamped "obsolete," is a matter of principle. Yet the conference question itself is not so fresh and dashing as it would like to appear. For decades now critics have angled at bringing the ax down on Critical Theory in just this vanguard fashion. The critique has long had a familiar shape. Taking a look at one of its earlier instances will give some insight into what is coiled up, unstated, in our conference question.

In 1979, a still youngish leftist, Mathias Greffrath, interviewed Leo Lowenthal. Critical Theory, Greffrath pointed out, "emerged from a unique historical constellation . . . to be precise, the epoch from 1914 to 1945." But, dated as it is — Greffrath continued — this theory is nevertheless being accepted by students all over the world. He then asked: "Aren't these young social scientists making a big mistake, if they all but close themselves off to contemporary experiences by applying themselves to these thoughts as if to the Talmud?"[1]

This idea is as familiar and commonsensical as it is obscure: only because thought and epoch are presumed indivisible is Greffrath able to accuse these 1970's radicals of meandering in the thought of an earlier age. But, if thought and epoch are so insolubly bound, how does it happen that they get mismatched?

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* Originally titled "Forget Adorno," this paper was presented at the *First Elizabethtown Telos Conference* (Feb. 23-29, 1990) on "The Future of Critical Theory."

1. Leo Lowenthal, "A Conversation with Mathias Greffrath" in *Critical Theory and Frankfurt Theorists* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1989), p. 254. The Talmud is more interesting, and much less known than this idiom lets on, which a German might be more circumspect about. It is important that the maxim does not take as its key figure the New Testament, a work that is studied with much greater intensity than the Jewish work.

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This is more than a logical conundrum. It gives a glimpse into the dialectic of time at the heart of this futurist panache. Despite the chronicler's posture, the pose is ahistorical: relativism denies that any thought is more than punctually true by measuring and debunking it according to a hidden standard of absolute, invariant truth (regardless of the fact that this standard is considered unattainable). This standard is apparent in the definition of the temporal as timeless: each instant is conceived as frozen beyond change in its moment of origin. It is because the writings of Critical Theory are assumed isolated from the course of time that they are automatically judged obsolete. Yet Greffreth's assumption is not self-assured. The historical is held to be simply past to the same degree that it is perceived as out of control and a permanent threat: The historical will not stay in its box. In this instance, it is Critical Theory that keeps coming back. Thus Greffrath's assertion of the pastness of history takes the form of a question. The Medusan eyes of anxiety transform history into a string of moments that crystalize in the instant of origin, yet the transformation remains necessarily partial; beyond the bravado. The result is history as *revenant*. This anxiety, then, produces the jinx that mismatches thought and epoch and, in Greffrath's eyes, misled the 1970s radicals.

If the interior of Greffrath's question were not this tension between history as "back then" and history as the uncontrollable past, he would not have sought out the old man of Critical Theory for confirmation that its day is gone. This elucidates the emotional nexus of Greffrath's question, which is a weave of brutality and dependence: The youthful, dedicated, spare-none reformer — echoed by our own conference question — wants to know why age still clings to life. But the reformer equally wants reassurance that time will not also have its way with him: "Wasn't time long ago?," Greffrath is asking Lowenthal. Lowenthal might have replied: "Right. No need to worry boy, I'll be taking time away with me." The topic here is history, yet history is a quality of what is temporal, which is nature. In the course of Enlightenment, nature and history have shared a single fate. Enlightenment is as much in charge of them as it is in a panic. This is why, by contrast, Lowenthal's answer to Greffrath was such a tremendous improvement on the question as to the obsolescence of Critical Theory and comes close to a real adjustment of the generations: "Often, I do not know for certain what the young people are talking about, but I am wholeheartedly behind them."[2]

Social Content

Like those streaks and curlicues that decorate the feet of cartoon characters with the illusion of powerful acceleration, the question — "Does Critical Theory Have A Future?" — provides a legitimating vector to the destruction of historical experience and the fragmentation of time. As such, the question could not be more inimical to the efforts of the writers it would judge, all of whom were primarily concerned with the problem of historical reflection. For

2. *Ibid.* p. 254.

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Adorno, obsolescence indicates something blocked: the absurdity perceived, for example, in the passion of 19th century romantic music is — he wrote — the mark of the arrestment of that century's impulse toward human emancipation.[3] The intention of his musicology is to recuperate that impulse for modern composition, just as his philosophy as a whole intends the recovery of the obsolete, theological concept of truth as fulfillment from the narrower, yet predominant, idea of truth as correctness. His writings are dialectical because dialectics wants to release the need in every concept. Thus *Aesthetic Theory* is an effort to reanimate not only the idea of aesthetics but those gawkily archaic concepts: natural beauty, the ugly, *niveau*, and so on. Similarly, Benjamin's vision was riveted by the *rire jaune* on the face of the obsolete, in which he recognized an ally of the historically defeated. The intensity with which Benjamin took sides here is well known in his shrill rage at the historiography of the victors from whom not "even the dead will be safe."[4]

It may be hard, from where we stand, to make sense of Benjamin's intensity, but it does highlight the obliqueness of our conference question to the impulse of Critical Theory. Still, the conference question is not to be dismissed as wrong-headed, but needs to be answered, although not in the fashion expected by the question: The Future of Critical Theory is the gathering grimness of American life. Reaching into the sack of evidence, and pulling out whatever, knowing that it must appear arbitrary, one might grab hold of Detroit, a city from which the communication lines are currently being cut. If you mention that you are going there, expect to be baited with: "No one goes to Detroit." It is obvious why. The devastation of the city is of earthquake proportions. But since the ground is not fissured or folded, it is necessary to imagine an inverse concussion that banged the horizon itself to one side, with the whole of its contents, shoving square blocks of houses off their foundations, many so completely that they hover in the air as if you could pass your hand under them corner to corner: a magical city of floating ruins. Looking for historical comparisons, Dresden was magnitudes more terrible, but at least the people did not helplessly bring the city down on their own heads; and, in the face of the rubble, the intention to rebuild was never in doubt. Detroit, by contrast, currently verges on being progressively abandoned. However remote this cityscape may seem, it is nevertheless the social content of our conference question.

Who's Smartest?

Telos is a valuable journal for lots of reasons: it is out on a limb, free of the academic bow tie, and soothingly chaotic as it lurches from issue to issue. In spite of its reputation, however, one of its specialties is not articles inspired by Adorno, et. al. True, *Telos* did contribute enormously to the translation of Adorno's work,

3. Adorno, "Klassik und Romantik," in *Gesammelte Schriften*, (Frankfurt a/M: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1978), Vol. 16, pp. 126-144.

4. Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," in *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Publisher, NY, 1976), p. 255.

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and at one point put a lot of thought into his writings. But, for a number of years now, with a few important exceptions, these writings have had little reality in the journal except to throw into relief the importance of more recent attachments, such as to Carl Schmitt. Yet the journal's identification with Adorno strangely lingers, while the actual distance from his work grows. Recognizing, and even magnifying this distance would be worthwhile. It would show up central aspects of Adorno's work never seriously considered in the journal's pages; a clearer grasp of these issues would permit the journal either to untwine itself from a body of thought it perhaps has little affinity for, or better pursue thought that may matter in ways *Telos* has not realized. But, however salutary the recognition of distance would be at this point, it is not easy to achieve. The main impediment is that instrument of over-close distance itself: *Telos's* resolutely theoretical, know-it-all, argumentative posture has been responsible for citing many of the better known *philosophemes* of Adorno's work — the critique of identity logic, the domination of nature, and the dialectic of enlightenment — without ever reflecting on the implication of these ideas for the theoretical posture itself. Had *Telos* followed through with these implications, it would have been obliged to give less grudging consideration to his aesthetics, and art altogether — a block characteristic of American philosophy and political science.

In its enchantment with the muscularity of theory, *Telos* once again runs altogether contrary to Adorno's work, which is a critique of theory. When Adorno writes that "idealism is the stomach turned mind," he is not only criticizing Hegel. The apothegm refers literally to the presentation in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* of a general critique of intellect as originating in the appetitive interest of archaic projection. The latter serves impulses of self-preservation by finding requisite preparatory motivations for attack and defense. A cat shooting around a house, possessed, leaping on its imaginary enemies, is illustrating the origins of theory. The event is of a part with our straining in the dark after those sounds that make the muscles twitch. The ability to suspect that these sounds are illusory is something developed historically — under the pressure of economic organization — as the power to distinguish internal from external sensation. This capacity transformed the paranoic power of projection into the potential of imagination for cognition. All knowledge requires projection because the object is never fully given in perception. One glance at the sparse markings of a symphony score, or a page of print, makes this plain. Thought, therefore, if it is to amount to knowledge, must give back to the object more than is received from it — thinking must exaggerate — which it can only do accurately so long as it can distinguish itself from its object. This is why Adorno, throughout his writings, repeats that it is only possible to be imaginatively within the object by being outside it.[5] Yet, to the degree that theory is defined by the pressure of self-preservation, the distance to the object is cancelled, and it paranoically becomes a medium of the self

5. Adorno's defense of individuality only fully makes sense in the context of this theory of knowledge. Likewise, it is the correlative of his claim of the need for distance as the predicate of all aesthetic experience.

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instead of the self acting as the medium of the object. The act of disposing over something, therefore, is one of being overly close, at the same time that there is no actual contact. According to *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, this event is not the exception, but characterizes the paranoic aspect of all theory: "Whenever intellectual energies are intentionally concentrated on the world outside; whenever we are involved in persecuting, fixing, and seizing, in those functions which have been intellectualized from the primitive suppression of animal nature into scientific methods of controlling nature, the subjective process is easily overlooked in the schematization, and the system is asserted to be the thing itself. Objectifying, like sick [paranoic] thought, contains the despotism of the subjective purpose which is hostile to the thing and forgets the thing itself."[6]

The paranoic element of theoretical intelligence is documented when paranoia itself turns up with the familiar — though rarely discussed — badge of sane thinking: angry incomprehension of the all-too-well understood world. Here is Tony Alamo, self-professed underground Arkansas evangelist, "World Pastor, Author, and renowned expert on Catholic cults": "It taxes the intelligent mind to understand how depraved popes, like John Paul II, have brainwashed so many people throughout the centuries into a zombie-type cult worship of these incredibly sinister false prophets and their gruesome Nazi religion. It is almost impossible to break a thoroughly brainwashed Catholic out of his or her zombie-like stupor or belief that the imbecilic pope is God. Only the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, from the King James Version of the Bible, can break the demonic spell of ignorance . . ."[7]

For paranoia, the struggle to know the object is a test of patience; intelligence as it labors is "taxed." And just as the endurence suffered by patience ultimately grants it the justice of retribution, for spinning its gears the paranoic intellect is ultimately rewarded with the wreath of saddened judiciousness when it observes that "it is almost impossible to break the misguided." This impossibility is, of course, just the degree of force that thinking has won for itself when the cure of the blind is undertaken. The anger at the incomprehensible is, then, not the surprising result of a wondrous lot of thinking. Rather, it is the moment in which thought comes into its own in establishing its righteousness, and thus, the self-certainty of its anger for the moment of attack. Thinking is the legitimation of fury. Adorno's claim is that this logic is not so rare. And if it is not, then neither is it so ironic that "theory" leads to a world that is perfectly understood while the thinker constantly arrives at a moment in which — in one fashion or another — the hands are thrown in the air and the incomprehensibility of the inhabitants is furiously denounced. This is a complex moment because, while the claim to

6. Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. by John Cumming (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972), p. 193. This quotation is taken from the general discussion of projection, pp. 187-200, on which this paper is based.

7. Tony Alamo, "World Pastor, Evangelist, Author, and Renowned Expert on Catholic Cults and Their Many Secretive Divisions and Governmental Agencies," in *Fugitive Pope* (Arkansas: Music Square Church, n.d.), p. 2.

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incomprehensibility is often a bare stand in for 'times-up,' the anger and exaltation are real. Yet the incomprehension is, in fact, also real. For the red in the face philosophy professor who is sure of his lucidity while the world goes on scrambling it all, or for the inveterately conceptual philosophy journal that abruptly asks if Critical Theory has any future — as if one might come to the conclusion that it is all nonsense to be swept away — thinking is the process of excluding its object from reflexion as preparation for its actual annihilation. How theory could be something other than the organization of rage, and actually do justice to its object, is the problem at the center of Adorno's writings and his effort at the recuperation of enlightenment from its destructiveness.

The Totally Administered Conference

Adorno's critique of theory, then, does not amount to the rejection of the *Drang nach Theorie* as simply delusive. Every element of reality is fully mediated; everything has the quality of hiding what it actually is, and, as a result, sanity requires the effort to expose "the monster that broods under the rock." The nature of the mediation, however, militates against interpretation in a complex fashion. The problem appears, for example, when Detroit is cited as a cipher of contemporary society. One wonders: "Why not Seattle?" While society is one,[8] virtually beyond imagining, the accepted standard of evidence is nominalistic: only the real particular may legitimately claim to exist, whereas any universal is held to be illusory.[9] Detroit, then, can only be evidence of Detroit, and even then one is compelled to question any description of the disaster of that city: "Really? All of Detroit? What about that tony subdivision, Grosse Point?" But the full interpretative difficulty of the situation is that this nominalist logic does not result in the particular element actually being expressively binding or sustaining much interest. For, despite the commonsense certainty that the particular exists independently of the universal, what appears in the individual is the process that transforms it into an example of the arbitrary whole and makes it as indifferent as the whole, which is itself currently beyond the power of reflection. That bewildering variety of rough draft now spoken by American Presidents brings to bear on every word a whole nation's power of abstraction. However, if one were to try to respond proverbially to such words by asking: "Say, what's that writing on the wall?," the eye that necessarily glosses such diffuse lingo with indifference would have to respond: "Oh, that. That's just the menetekel." Similarly (and I need to preface what I am about to say with the insistence that I am talking about conference papers as such, mine as one of them, and not anyone's paper in particular) the little sense that the papers at this conference will make, or will be made of the papers, is of a part with the bureaucratic organization of the conference. Categories were arbitrarily chosen — "Foundations, Politics, and Popular

8. Theodor W. Adorno, *et. al.*, *The Positivism Dispute in German Sociology*, trans. by Glyn Adey and David Frisby (New York: Harper Torchbook, 1976), p. 76.

9. Robert Spaemann and Reinhardt Loew, *Die Frage Wozu* (Munich: Peiper Verlag, 1981).

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Culture" — and then papers were solicited that could hardly have more than a tangential relation to the categories they are in or any special relation to each other. The papers are therefore limited to twenty minutes each, a rule that embodies a dialectical consideration: Since it is an open secret that the event has no internal order, the papers conjured up could not themselves have a compelling inner order. Thus the genie is permitted out of the bottle only by preagreement that it return to it when the big hand gets to twenty, the now standard length of literally hundreds of convention papers delivered around the country in just the same circumstance.

"Freeze"

Many children's games originated in historical disasters and their overcoming. "Ring around the rosie" — "ashes, ashes, all fall down" — was an act of mimetic adjustment to the inevitability of the plague in the effort to gain a type of control over it. Similarly, "Statue" recalls the historical moment in which the word, as fetish, could paralyze with fright. "Statue" toys with this power, and teaches how to master the spell: Fascination is escaped by inflicting it on oneself. Hearing the cry "statue," those who willfully maintain the grotesque pose of shock win by modeling themselves on the shock received, making themselves as frightening as what frightens, in contrast to the one who lets the posture fall and is "out," an historical euphemism.[10] The contemporary language of theory is a form of "Statue" in which the terminologically uncanny demands reciprocation in the form of frozen linguistic postures. Derrida is in a sense right that "*différance*" is not a word; it is a fetish. As such, it is not so extraordinary a concoction as is seen in the context of other agglutinated brandname neologisms, such as *Genutech*, whose *force de frappe* is the capacity to compel identification. People stutter out "deconstruction," "*differand*," "narrativity," "postmodern," as if they feared that otherwise the waters would close over their heads forever: which is crazy, but, in terms of academic life, not completely illusory. The terms are propped up as fixtures of inevitability in sentences that are otherwise arbitrarily constructed. As language threatens to dissolve, and thought becomes increasingly fearful, all words are potentially transformed into neologisms, a situation that — in his development of terms such as "*Dasein*" — Heidegger especially exploited, as do all those who, more recently, find it impossible to resist repeating "generate," "sophisticated," "privileging," "inscribe," and "deploy." The equivalent in pop culture to the terminology of theory are the heavy-metal rock stars, whose eyes claim to stare through you, but whose primary quality is sycophantic.

No Critical Theory

If critical language is to matter it must shock, but its power to shock prepares its metamorphosis into jargon. Adorno kept this in mind; otherwise he

10. *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, *op. cit.*, pp. 17-21 and 179-181.

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would not have excluded such striking formulations as "negative dialectics" and "*musique informelle*" from the whole of his writings except for those they title. Even *Aesthetic Theory* shows no trace of them, even though they are germane to that volume and all three works were written in part simultaneously. Similarly, "cultural criticism" for the most part appears only in the *Prism's* essay, "Cultural Criticism and Society."[11] Adorno tried to protect his language from becoming a fetish by putting a taboo on it himself. This succeeded in that it produced the puzzle of how concepts that were both developed and excluded can be quoted in the usual summary fashion. Nevertheless, his last writings show the evidence of a rigidification of a language that tried so insistently to pre-empt the power of jargon that it became hyper-stylized. This he was also aware of. In a late letter to his close friend, Eduard Steuermann, he wrote: "I am beginning to sound like a broken record to myself."[12]

Another failing of his later writings is that the concept of "Critical Theory" begins to play a somewhat more frequent role than earlier, though he at no point gave the concept special emphasis. It may be surprising, but Adorno never wrote anything that carried this concept in its title[13] and it is only rarely cited in the whole of his writings. While his concept of theory appears in many different forms, as "theory," "immanent criticism," "second reflexion," "Geist," "dialectical critique," etc, "critical theory" is just one, and the rarest variant. Our conference title gives a clue to why Adorno rarely cites it: When the Future goes hunting for the obsolete in Frankfurt School writings, its eye catches first on the reification, "Critical Theory." Horkheimer documents the wooden quality of this concept, which he institutionalized in a volume titled *Critical Theory* when he pedantically denounced the "thoughtless and dogmatic application of the Critical Theory," and appealed to "all those seriously involved in the Critical Theory."[14] Adorno would have sensed in such phrases about "the Critical Theory" something similar to Benjamin's rigid distinction between auratic and non-auratic art, a pair of boxes between which one could divide up right thinking from wrong.

The End of Theory

In spite of Adorno's well known arguments with Benjamin, his own distance from Critical Theory must be measured by his closeness to Benjamin, who cannot be dragged in under that heading. They shared, as the regulative idea of theory, the cabalistic maxim that every dream contains its own interpretation. If false projection is a medium of intentionality, critique must be a logic of

11. "Cultural Criticism" is also used as the title of a small collection of Adorno's essays and volume 10 of the collected writings. In both instances, however, these were given this title posthumously by the editor.

12. Letter to Eduard Steuermann, undated (approximately 1966).

13. The only exception is a newspaper interview from 1969, "Kritische Theorie und Protestbewegung," in *Gesammelte Schriften*, Vol. 20, pp. 398-401. The title was provided by the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*.

14. Max Horkheimer, *Critical Theory*, trans. by Frederick O'Connell (N.Y.: Continuum, 1989), p. v.

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the non-intentional by subordinating imagination to the primacy of the object. In his early writings, Adorno calls this ideal of theory "exact fantasy."[15] In the focus on the non-intentional, it is similar to psychoanalysis, but here the object is compelled to an equivalent of free association — and its facade challenged — by the radicalization of its claim to self-identity. As Adorno wrote, the thinker does not think so much as become the passively active arena where the non-intentional self criticism of the object is made to appear.[16] Therefore, rather than dividing the true from the false, the problem of theory is (though this way of putting it is easy to misinterpret) to make visible what is true in the false. Adorno would not have been interested in implying — as does Horkheimer's opposition of "traditional and critical theory" — that positivist sociology, for example, can be lobbed into the former box. The problem, instead, is to interpret it by developing its own content: "The lack of freedom in positivism's methods serves freedom by attesting wordlessly to the predominant lack of freedom."[17] Reflexion transforms the technical method into a field of tension that is the object's opposition to itself. The critical content of positivist sociological technique is the exigency of history that has been silenced, and how it has been silenced can be read out of the technique itself. Therefore, the future of positivist sociology would not be defined by its being eclipsed as the predominant model of social research. It not only collects history as it ages, but as its intentional aspects dissolve, as the direct claims of its research become a subordinate concern, and perhaps a matter of indifference, what will become visible in these sociology journals, their graphs, ascetic certainties, etc. can not be anticipated. This is not hermeneutics because it does not assume *a priori* that the object is meaningful; neither is this approach a variety of relativism, for the object itself ages. And the interpretative form that could present the content of the object is not all that theoretical: Enlightenment only outwits itself when theory gains what is not theory.[18] Thought must succeed at translating "second nature" into first nature.[19] This gives some direction for the interpretation of Adorno's own work as much as for the interpretation of a conference title like "Does Critical Theory Have A Future?" The aim of Adorno's immanent criticism was to bring to consciousness the weight of history. Without a doubt, he thought that if the eye cannot find a way to estimate that weight, perceive it as binding, and recognize that the problem of history is to make good on what has transpired, there will not be any future.

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15. The equivalent concept in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* is the "positive concept of Enlightenment," and in the *Aesthetic Theory* it largely overlaps with the idea of *Geist*.

16. See, Theodor W. Adorno "Essay as Form," *New German Critique* 32 (Spring-Summer, 1984), pp. 151-171.

17. *The Positivism Dispute*, *op. cit.*, p. 74.

18. This summary is taken from many sources in Adorno's writings, but especially *The Positivism Dispute*, *op. cit.*, pp. 69-86.

19. See Theodor W. Adorno, "The Idea of Natural-History," in *Telos* 60 (Summer 1984), pp. 97-110.

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Does Critical Theory Need Saints or Foundations?[1]

Paul Piccone

The Secularization of Critical Theory?

There are two kinds of conferences: "professional" ones held primarily for mundane purposes such as academic accreditation, disciplinary legitimation, recruiting, etc.; and "thematic" ones allegedly concerned with providing opportunities for experts in some particular field to articulate and develop specific problems. Clearly, whereas the first kind is usually characterized by routine "business," boredom and hidden agenda, the second tends to overemphasize otherwise minor differences and details into *causus belli*. Worse yet, since the very formulation of the conference's title already presupposes a particular interpretation of its theme, it often happens that the conference itself becomes the issue. That is precisely what happened in the "First Elizabethtown *Telos* Conference." Hence, before even attempting a systematic presentation of any particular thesis within the conference's scope, it becomes necessary to defend its central theme, "The Future of Critical Theory," against dissidents — a task which particularizes the issue in terms of relatively minor differences within a generally shared theoretical framework.

What may initially appear as theoretical ripples in a relatively small Critical Theory pond, upon closer scrutiny turn out to reflect much more substantial problems. Thus Robert Hullot-Kentor's defense of Adorno and Critical Theory as sacred entities impervious to either definitive interpretations or historicizations reflects an old theological conundrum whereby God, *qua* infinity, omnipotence and omniscence, can neither be exhaustively comprehended by any limited human understanding nor reduced to any historically-specific interpretation without falling into idolatry. As *Truth*, not only is it absolute and unchanging, but also beyond theory: it can only be grasped preconceptually, or mystically,

1. This is an extensively revised version of a paper on "Does Critical Theory Need a Foundation?" originally prepared for delivery in the First Elizabethtown *Telos* Conference. Unfortunately, it was scheduled immediately after Robert Hullot-Kentor's "Theory of the Future." Because the latter turned out to be a systematic attack on the conference as such, what was actually delivered was a detailed response to the charges. Thus, from merely an attempt to rescue Critical Theory from the revisionism of "communication theory," it turned out to be a defense of a different kind of "revisionism" and a critique of efforts sanctify the members of the first generation of Critical Theorists.

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through the only mode of apprehension appropriate to it, *faith*. Having hypostatized St. Adorno above and beyond any possible criticism, modification or deviation from what inevitably turn out to be peculiarly idiosyncratic and canonized readings (in this case, his own), Kentor must reject all historicizations of Adorno as blasphemy (one has either not understood him properly, or has not read some obscure note yet unpublished, or has reduced him to a particular position exagerated at a specific time, or . . .). As such, discussions of Critical Theory deteriorate into theoretical inquisitions or the philosophical equivalents of "holy wars" against non-believers. Since, like Pope Pius XII at the time of the Yalta Conference, Kentor does not seem to have too many Army divisions or secret police at his disposal to suppress dissenting opinions, the question remains open for debate and the alleged "infidels" may have their say.

"Orthodox" Critical Theory?

What is most annoying in Kentor's attack is that, behind his Zen-like formulations — presumably meant to provide pseudo-Benjaminian allegoric flashes of that which can only be sensed, but never fully apprehended or understood by mortal minds — hides a Tertullian dogmatism: *credo quia est absurdum*. This is why he can praise Lowenthal's appallingly irresponsible reassurance to Greffrath — to the effect that "Often, I do not know for certain what the young people are talking about, but I am wholeheartedly behind them." It is as if the Nazis could never have been "young people," or that youth is any guarantee against stupidity. Since, for Kentor, Critical Theory is not really "theory" but historical reflection, and the latter is always an effort to trap through reason that which can never be fully grasped as such without at the same time destroying it in the process, youthful innocence becomes almost a prerequisite for avoiding the conceptual closures created by the experiential debris that prevents those who have already had their day — and are thus compromised into a frozen mind-set — from reflecting historically. This is why "young people," irrespective of whatever controlled substance they may have injested in their desperate effort to find a shortcut to "historical reflection" and thus have a glimpse of the Absolute, are in some sense always right, and those terminally caught in the *Realpolitik* of everyday life who cannot, as a result, understand them should, with Lowenthal, get their act together and stand "wholeheartedly behind them."

As an aesthetic horizon, Kentor's orthodox Critical Theory can never be translated into a social program or a political project. As the modern equivalent of what Hegel ridiculed as "the beautiful soul,"[2] it would thereby risk

2. For the original deployment of Hegel's critique of Schlegel's "beautiful soul," i.e., as the theoretician of subjective irony, against Critical Theory, see Mitchell Franklin, "The Irony of the Beautiful Soul of Herbert Marcuse," in *Telos* 6 (Fall 1970), pp. 3ff. Franklin, however, meant this critique as a condemnation of Critical Theory for not participating in Communist Party politics which he regarded as the only way to politically concretize philosophy.

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crashing into "the grimness of American life" or, worse yet, unknowingly end up in a Detroit whose real concrete universality (exemplifying the thoroughly fractured totality) it can no longer grasp without forcibly reconciling it with that one-dimensionality it originally sought to indict. Since, as truth, orthodox Critical Theory has no past, it cannot have a future. To claim otherwise is to have misunderstood what Adorno was really all about and forfeit any right to aspire to such an illustrious heritage. Only by acknowledging one's distance from that which has been desecrated as socio-political theory, or reading backwords all of Adorno's *Gesammelte Schriften* and listening to his otherwise terrible compositions, will the infidels be allowed back into the Church's narthex by its self-appointed High Priest.

Rumors to the contrary notwithstanding, like every other mortal, Adorno also put his pants on in the morning one leg at a time and, yes, occasionally wrote pretty silly and pretentious things — such as *Negative Dialectics* — and wasted a lot of time reinventing positions already developed much better by other people before him, such as Husserl (whom he systematically misread and never really understood). Kentor's Benjaminification of Adorno cannot possibly mystify his ideas beyond critical scrutiny. And this scrutiny cannot be allowed to take the form of ancestor worship, but must consist of an *appropriation* not of St. Adorno *an sich*, but of Adorno *für uns*. This means reading Adorno not as having grasped truth once and for all, so that our reading would have to be a kind of theological-hermeneutical enterprise, but an appreciation of what solutions he proposed for the sort of problems he confronted. Some of his formulations were brilliant (such as his account of anti-Semitism), some pretty stupid (such as the infamous F-scale), some insightful at the time they were thought out but now obsolete (such as the theory of the culture industry), and others unnecessarily abtruse, trivial, and articulated much better by others (such as *mimesis* and the return to nature).

Thus the question of the future of Critical Theory is not the kind of *hubris* Kentor thinks it is on the basis of his sanctification of Teddy, but essential for those who still see themselves within a certain intellectual tradition. Rather than attempting to establish how many art works can dance on the tip of a flower while blissfully immersed in Schoenberg's music, it may also be helpful to ask whether approaching the world the way Adorno did still makes any sense. This question is all the more relevant, since the so-called "second generation" of critical theorists have distorted that tradition beyond recognition by falling back into the most abysmal forms of conformism, academicism and scholasticism. As someone said (or should have said) critical theorists have hitherto interpreted Critical Theory; the point, however, is to change it.

In the same way Lukács approached Marx in *History and Class Consciousness*, the question of Critical Theory today is not so much a matter of recycling Adorno's writings on this or that topic, but of salvaging his spirit (which the professedly rabid anti-idealist Lukács mistakenly reduced to mere "method"). In what he regarded as the age of one-dimensionality or of the totally administered

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society, Adorno concluded that this spirit could be effectively articulated only in the aesthetic dimension. The second generation of critical theorists, i.e., what Murray Bookchin has aptly labelled Habermas Ltd.,[3] have rejected such a restrictive eschatological scenario and, in the attempt to turn Critical Theory into a rigorous social science worthy of academic recognition and accolades, has reassigned emancipation from art to social science within a Kantian framework predicated on apodictic discursive presuppositions as the necessary foundations of all future Critical Theory. In so doing, however, they have fallen precisely into the trap Kentor warns against. Is this outcome inevitable? Is it possible to concretize Critical Theory into a political project without at the same time paying such a high price? Can Critical Theory be historicized and regrounded on different theoretical foundations so as to escape the political impotence of the first generation? The second generation of critical theorists sought to answer these questions by providing new theoretical foundations. The project, however, failed. Only after undoing of the theoretical damage caused by the second generation's reconstruction of Critical Theory and elaborating altenatives to it, will it be possible to inquire as to what kind of *phenomenological* foundations may be needed to sustain it.

Critical Theory on Neo-Kantian Foundations?

However fashionable it may be in the age of postmodernity, the question whether Critical Theory can be regrounded on new Kantian foundations is in need of careful scrutiny. It presupposes a mason's or carpenter's *Weltanschauung* and, as a result, already prefigures the obvious answer. If foundations are what houses and buildings rest on, then, clearly, it is inconceivable to have any such structure resting on anything else without risking an untrustworthy superstructure. Unfortunately, today Critical Theory can be approached through such a simplistic metaphor only if sufficiently qualified. To stretch the construction analogy to the limit, the house of social and political theory is not one merely at the planning stage, waiting to be built from well-defined architectural drawings, so that laying foundations necessarily precedes the erection of walls and ceilings, but part of a cultural public housing project, full of old structures in various stages of decay which, because of bureaucratic obstacles posed by the ever watchful academic equivalent of the Public Housing Department, are only susceptible to gut-rehab. Within social theory, the experience of revolutionary slum clearance programs during the past two centuries has been either one of futility or of catastrophies — all of which tends to discourage any quixotic architectural project which does not begin from the given. It thus becomes necessary to anticipate as much as possible the likely consequences of the proposed reconstructions, so to minimize surprises.

If the predicament of social and political theory today is not one of constructing the ideal ultra-modern buildings of a Brasilia but, rather, more reminiscent

2. Murray Bookchin, "On Habermas, Ltd.," in *Telos* 52 (Summer 1982).

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of the morass of New York City's public housing, i.e., how to upgrade an immense stock of decrepit buildings, then the question of foundation is really secondary. The starting point is unavoidably the existing cultural slum, which already has a complex history and is besieged by a number of theoretical developers or self-appointed people's advocates, all proposing various projects of social reconstruction based on a multitude of more or less hidden agendas. Within such a context, questions pertaining to foundations arise, at best, only after a clear picture of the renovated structure has already been prefigured and it becomes necessary to check final details before actual reconstruction can begin. Unfortunately, Critical Theory has not only been already carefully elaborated, it has also undergone several major gut-rehabs, most of which, reminiscent of the kind of sloppy "modernization" carried out on many grand old buildings in the 1950s and 1960s, have clearly done considerably more harm than good. On the pretense of cleaning up annoying aporiae allegedly having to do with political impotence, passivity, insurmountable antinomies, etc. generated by classical Critical Theory, the "new and improved" version deployed in the early 1960s simply backtracked to an eclectic upgraded copy of that "traditional" theory the founding fathers sought to break away from. It became difficult to see any connection between the first two generations of critical theorists in anything but the name.

Today it is impossible to defend Horkheimer's dubious distinction of Traditional and Critical Theory, predicated on crude economistic/materialistic enthymemes and a promise of social emancipation after the appropriate social agency of change had managed to translate it into political practice. Contrary to the unanimous agreement of practically all the members of the core group of the Frankfurt School, who unconditionally defended his creativity, leadership, and theoretical brilliance, Horkheimer is increasingly receding in importance as a rather boring and unoriginal thinker whose role has been inflated by his controlling position in the Institute's bureaucracy. He certainly cannot be taken as the final authority on what constitutes classical Critical Theory. Yet at least some of what he outlined in his too-often-quoted essay on the question, such as the emphasis on totality, the rejection of the neo-Kantian or Weberian subdivision of reality into self-contained autonomous spheres, the focus on alienation as the key feature of capitalist society, and the retention of the dialectic as the main methodological tool, remain classical Critical Theory's decisive categories which set it in drastic contrast with its linguistic successor.

This is not the place to compare Adorno & Co. with Habermas Ltd. Yet the sharp differences between the two are essential since what is needed is not simply another recycling of Adorno's or Marcuse's idiosyncratic accounts, but the social and political role of both versions of the theory and, most importantly, possible alternatives — those formulated by the third generation of critical theorists. The main undeveloped alternative is what, for lack of a better name, was called the theory of artificial negativity and, for various reasons, never developed beyond some rudimentary formulations.

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Testing Critical Theory

If one compares what projections could have or were actually made by artificial negativity and by the communication version of Critical Theory fifteeen years ago, it becomes quite obvious the extent to which the former has been immensely closer to the mark than the latter. According to Critical Theory as communication theory, during the 1970s and the 1980s progressive modernization should have led to increased participation in the democratic process by previously excluded groups, a more equitable distribution of the social product, a decline in pre-modern remnants such as racism and sexism, better planning as a result of the deployment of the knowledge accumulated by the social sciences (even in the now defunct or rapidly declining "really existing socialism"), the rationalization of bureaucracies in terms of greater efficiency and better accountability to the citizenry, a growth of critical awareness in society at large, and increasing cultural creativity as a result of the rise in general education and culture. Not only has none of the above taken place, but these Panglossian projections today appear as nothing but bad copies of their traditional liberal counterparts. Furthermore, contrary to the claim to be able to generate some emancipatory praxis (in contrast to the passivity and alleged pessimism of the late Adorno), all communication theory has done in North America has been to carve out some marginal academic space within which its practitioners, under the pretense of providing a broader synthetic account, merely duplicate dubious and already well-developed liberal analyses.

What did the theory of artificial negativity project some 15 years ago when originally formulated?[4] Diametrically opposed to communication theory's optimistic outlook for growing rationalization and democratization, it postulated increasing rationalization of the parts counterbalanced by an increasing irrationalization of the whole, the reintroduction of new relations of domination under the pretense of eliminating old ones (with the help of whatever opposition remained), the artificial creation of plurality and diversity in the frantic effort to generate internal opposition to displace eroded internal control mechanisms, a conservative involution by the organized Left and, most importantly, the failure of all of these developments to effectively rationalize an increasingly decadent social system. Contrary to the born-again liberal advocates of Critical Theory as communication theory in the US, which saw "really existing socialism" as strong, stable social formations to be confronted militarily or otherwise[5] whenever they posed concrete threats to the "democratic West," the theory

4. For the earliest formulation of these theses, see Paul Piccone, "From Tragedy to Farce: The Return of Critical Theory," in *New German Critique* 7 (Winter 1976), pp. 91-104; "The Crisis of One-Dimensionality," in *Telos* 35 (Spring 1978), pp. 43-54; and Tim Luke, "Culture and Politics in the Age of Artificial Negativity" in the same issue.

5. These issues were discussed in *Telos* 53 (Fall 1982), in relation to Cornelius Castoriadis' book *Devant la Guerre*, which took the absurd position that, since communist societies could not be reformed, military conflict between East and West was unavoidable. For a summary of these discussions, see Moishe Gonzales, "Exorcising *Perestroika*." in *Telos* 81 (Fall 1989), pp. 130-153.

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of artificial negativity saw these societies as terminally bureaucratized, rapidly declining and, if anything, eventually feeding into the market logic of end-of-the-century capitalism.[6]

The dialectic of living vs. dead labor was redefined entirely *within* a capitalism no longer even minimally threatened by any internal opposition: as the dialectic of bureaucracy pitting a New Class based on *cultural* rather than *financial* capital, against disenfranchised and progressively cretinized *clients* rather than *proletarians*. The upshot of this conflict was no longer an *economic* crisis, as in traditional Marxism, or a *legitimation* crisis, as in communication theory, but primarily a *rationality* crisis precipitated by the erosion of the tension between the bureaucratic apparatus and those whom it claimed to serve. The dialectic of enlightenment whereby an instrumental rationality of abstract formal relations systematically displaces living realities took its toll no longer, as in Lukács, by reducing labor to a mere commodity, thus prefiguring a possible revolutionary reintegration of the almost completely commodified subject with its alienated and expropriated object: the subject-object identity or the Hegelian spirit finally conscious of itself and able to shed its debilitating capitalist chains; rather, this dialectic gradually eroded the very preconditions necessary for the smooth reproduction of the new and improved capitalist system, thus generating an unprecedented rationality crisis tendentially susceptible neither to revolutionary transformation nor to crisis management. What Russell Jacoby has, tongue-in-cheek, called "the law of the falling rate of intelligence,"[7] not only precludes its very formulation but fosters the development of a pacified one-dimensional society of obedient, well-fed, state-dependent sub-individuals effectively manipulated by a bureaucratic apparatus increasingly unable to guarantee the perpetuation of the conditions necessary for its reproduction. This amounts to the definitive integration of all internal opposition and, therefore, also the elimination of the crucial control mechanisms this opposition had, *nolens volens*, hitherto provided. Deprived of that internal opposition, which had historically functioned as the political equivalent of Adam Smith's famous "invisible hand" in the marketplace, this bureaucratic apparatus becomes increasingly irrational, to the point that, in order to guarantee its subsequent reproduction, it is forced to *artificially* create from above the conditions conducive to the reconstitutions of precisely that internal opposition it had successfully annihilated during an earlier phase of social development. To the extent that opposition has to be *spontaneous* and *autonomous* to perform its regulatory function within the system, this remedial strategy also fails. It ends up generating a whole series of internal pseudo-oppositions which not only cannot regulate the system but tend to corrupt every other hitherto potentially emancipatory agency into impotent extensions of the very system they allegedly oppose. This self-defeating

6. Paul Piccone and Victor Zaslavsky, "The Socio-Economic Roots of Re-Armament," in *Telos* 50 (Winter 1981-82, pp. 5-18.

7. Russell Jacoby, "A Falling Rate of Intelligence?" in *Telos* 27 (Spring 1976), pp. 141ff.

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logic can be eventually avoided only with the effective integration of a potentially resurgent populist opposition and a refederalization of the system.[8]

Social Engineering for Disaster

One of the more paradoxical consequences of this state of affairs is the already mentioned conservative involution of what remained of the Left. This should come as no surprise. The main Old Left organizing myth, the central plan, was effectively integrated by the New Deal to stabilize an entrepreneurial capitalism mired in a major economic crisis of overproduction and underconsumption, but only long enough to destroy most of that autonomous creativity and energy which made capitalism the dynamic economic system that it was. The Vietnam war and the Great Society, opposite sides of the same ideological coin, revealed the extent to which the new bureaucratic apparatus could not readily adjust to the new socio-historical conditions it had helped bring about and was itself in need of internal rationalization. The war was predicated on a communist expansionism which, after the 1956 Khrushchev revelations and the Sino-Soviet split had shown its bankruptcy as a meaningful threat, sought to guarantee the unchecked continuation of an imperialist strategy in an age when a new and more ruthless and effective form of financial and high-tech imperialism had already displaced it — as became obvious a decade later. What did result was weakened US international competitiveness *via à vis* the real competitors, Germany and Japan,[9] and a severely threatened US international hegemony, which was only partly restored in the 1970s and 80s by means of a clever manipulation of the two oil crises to generate large amounts of petro-dollars with which to subsequently indenture even more effectively, by means of huge loans and promises of technological modernization, a disintegrating Third World, an increasingly backward Second World, and the rest of the First World now deeply mired in the financial network carefully orchestrated from Washington.

The Great Society completed the project of social homogenization launched by the New Deal to standardize markets by stabilizing effective demand through the culture industry. But, in so doing, welfare capitalism and its cultural otherness — modernity — exhausted their latent political mandate and undermined their unacknowledged preconditions to the point that any further development could take place only by undertaking a drastic reversal meant to reconstitute

8. Only much later, with the rediscovery of a repressed native populist tradition, did it become possible to identify in a federalist populism the conditions whereby artificially generated negativity could turn into its organic counterpart. Cf. various authors, "The Empire Strikes Out: A Roundtable on Populist Politics, Community and Culture," in this issue of *Telos*. Cf. also Paul Piccone and G. L. Ulmen, "Schmitt's 'Testament' and the Future of Europe," in *Telos* 83 (Spring 1990); and various authors, "Schmitt's 'Testament' and the Future of Europe: Four Exchanges," in *Telos* 85 (all 1990).

9. For an analysis of Germany's and Japan's competitive edge over the US in the post-Vietnam era, see "Schmitt's 'Testament' and the Future of Europe: Four Exchanges," *op. cit.*, pp. 129-137.

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the eroded, submerged, and thereby invisible sources of dynamic growth. The success and failure of Reaganism in the 1980s rotated entirely around this point. It seemed to suceed in that the emphasis on entrepreneurialism and privatization — understood as the vindication of personal initiative and individuality against the deadening formalism of bureacratic rationality — sought to revitalize some autonomous sources of energy and creativity, but it ultimately failed in that both were quickly re-bureaucratized by the neoconservative counter-revolution, thereby curtailing whatever dynamic they provided. More importantly, the homogenizing thrusts of this liberal legislation were effectively reversed with the rise of cultural particularism and its institutional otherness, affirmative action legislation. Since the latter best exemplifies the logic of artificial negativity as well as its most abysmal failures, it is worth analyzing in some detail.

After WWI, the Americanization strategy of the culture industry sought to forge a national identity and a uniform market out of a fragmented multi-ethnic society effectively ruled by a WASP elite and hitherto regulated by highly successful exclusionary mechanisms such as racism and sexism. This social homogenization greatly facilitated the transition from labor-intensive to capital-intensive production (which in "socialist" countries has been impossible to carry out) by constituting "Americans" as standardized consumers and readily exchangeable producers. This created the preconditions for mass production, a great improvement in living standards, an abysmal cultural impoverishment, and the rationalization of entrepreneurial into oligopolistic capitalism. But it also destroyed that diversity, autonomy and will to innovate which had hitherto distinguished Americans from the rest of the world and had resulted in unprecedented prosperity. The massive system imbalances that became obvious first in the 1960s and much more so in the 1970s and 1980s, show the extent to which this homogenization eventually also meant the end of American exceptionalism, declining international competitiveness, and a serious threat to its world hegemony. Worse yet, bureaucratically mandated homogenization, with the help of military Keynesianism, while temporarily restoring profitability and therefore the viability of transnational capitalism, failed to usher in the promised social equality, rationality and efficiency. The "rediscovery" of cultural particularism, prefigured by the culture industry from the mid-1960s, smoothly fed into the Great Society corporatist strategy of enfranchising previously excluded groups to allegedly guarantee formal political representation, but, more importantly, to diversify the polity enough to restore a minimal negativity without which the bureaucratic apparatus threatened to choke the productive system into economic paralysis.

The paradox of a system supporting its own internal opposition and paving the way for the postmodern pseudo-challange to the predominant cultural modernity is thus explainable in terms of efforts to streamline an exhausted model of social organization by means of new corporatist mechanisms meant to facilitate bureaucratic management and provide enough feed-backs to guarantee a

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minimal systemic rationality. The tendential setting of fixed racial or gender quotas reinforced the very boundaries and socio-cultural barriers to be erased by providing, among other things, incentives for their perpetuation. Thus cultural particularism deteriorated to an ideology of upwardly mobile middle class cadres once the pathology of existing social inequality became a convenient means of personal career advancement by providing extraneous advantages to people who could readily certify their particularistic "oppressed" identity. The result was the universalization of historically contingent conditions of social inequality, the elimination of which is now against the interests of the most vocal and dynamic members of the very groups to be emancipated.[10] It created what years ago Alvin W. Gouldner, in discussing the hidden pathologies of sociological activism, described as the "zookeeper mentality," i.e., the social activists' objective hidden interest in perpetuating the very conditions they expose in order to guarantee their privileged personal social roles.[11] Worse yet, the resulting social engineering has turned out to be an abysmal failure. While social engineers can always explain the failure of programs in terms of inadequate efforts and reluctance to commit to the task resources commensurate with the extent of the problem (thus using their failure as justification for intensification rather than redirection of the policies in question), the fate of bureaucratism and its complementary New Class ideology today seems effectively sealed.

The sudden and spectacular collapse of communism has generated unbounded capitalist euphoria and, consequently, diverted attention from the paradoxical fact that, far from representing a mere disintegration of a radical alternative, this failure also points to the Achilles' heel of advanced capitalism — a system whose serious internal dysfunctions are not qualitatively different from those of its communist other. Ultimately "really existing socialism" failed much earlier than "really existing capitalism" because, much more than the latter, the former could not tolerate the existence of *any* negativity. Thus the relatively exceptional absurdities of a bureaucratic system unchecked by internal control mechanisms, one the principal examples of this system being the military-industrial complex (the targets of former Senator Proxmire's well-publicized "golden fleece awards"), have for years been the rule in Soviet military procurement practices. The USSR's spectacular scientific-military successes have been achieved at costs so astronomical that only the paranoid secrecy of socialist accounting methods have been able to hide them from public outrage — or even from the "clever" analyses of the CIA's "Team Two" a few years ago, which readily became the ideological bases for Reagan's remilitarization strategy. The price paid for the Soviet successes of their over-bureaucratized "closed industries" was the impoverishment of the remaining civilian economy, general technological backwardness,

10. Cf. Special Section on "Affirmative Action in Academia" in *Telos* 86 (Winter 1990-91), pp. 103-140.

11. Alvin W. Gouldner, *For Sociology: Renewal and Critique in Sociology Today* (New York: Basic Books, 1973).

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and immensely higher costs for the most pedestrian military devices (a feature which militates against Gorbachev's liberal pipedreams of a smooth conversion of military into civilian production following the end of the Cold War).[12]

Clearly, if the crisis of "really existing socialism" is, first and foremost, one of bureaucracy and New Class ideology (after all, it should not be forgotten that the theory the New Class was originally developed to deal with these kinds of societies by Machajsky, Djilas and, more recently, by Konrad and Szelenyi), then it also extends to the US, where oligopolistic capitalism has become so overbureaucratized and inefficient that it is finding it increasingly difficult to compete internationally. The few sectors of US industries that thrive are precisely those, like the high-tech industries of Silicon Valley, which have succeeded in avoiding the deadening bureaucratization presently strangling industrial giants like GM, Ford, IBM, etc.

A Phenomenological Foundation?

The differences betweem the second and the third generations of critical theorists are now obvious: unlike communication theory's privileging of language and discourse as the arena within which projects of social reconstruction and political emancipation are to be fought, artificial negativity theorists focus instead on projects conducive to the constitution of autonomous organic communities able to generate a minimal individuality necessary for democratic institutions and a high-tech society, independently of bureaucratic mediation and domination.

From this viewpoint, the privileging of objectivism and language inexorably turns communication theorists into New Class ideologists. Their protestations to the contrary notwithstanding, they become the advocates of increased bureaucratization deemed inevitable and, at best, only susceptible to technocratic controls. However, their understanding of the relation between the bureaucratic apparatus and those served by it corresponds precisely to what obtains today in liberal-democratic societies. Here the controlling role of the polity fails to the extent that linguistically competent citizens tend to be systematically absorbed in the New Class, thereby rendering politics onesided and reducing it to, e.g., inter-departmental squabbles over budget allocations justified in terms of particularistic New Class interpretations of social needs.

The hypostatization of preconditions for discourse to necessary presuppositions for all social theory not only sanctifies the New Class' cultural capital as the only viable political currency but also prescribes as equally necessary and therefore universally binding its subsequent particularistic normative projects. Within this framework, however, the subject is reduced to the level of a *res cogitans* forever seeking a consensus among equally abstract social agents. Far from confronting the raw reality of everyday life, everything comes in already

12. Evgenii Kuznetsov and Felix Shirokov, "Problems of Conversion of Soviet Defense Industries," in *Telos* 81 (Fall 1989), pp. 52-62.

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manufactured as ideas within a qualitatively different domain, that of *labor*, which, characterized by necessity, is beneath the dignity of those privileged to operate in the ethereal realms of interaction (the domain of freedom).

The artificial negativity version of Critical Theory remains true to the founding fathers, at least to the extent that it generalizes the emancipatory potentials of aesthetic experience to *all possible experience* not corrupted by alienation and reification. Since it rejects as hopelessly obsolete Adorno's original theory of the culture industry, i.e., as inextricably bound to the historically contingent conditions of the US in the 1940s and 1950s, it no longer accepts everyday popular consciousness as terminally integrated within the predominant logic of domination. The culture industry did attempt to deploy the kind of strategy brilliantly described in the chapter devoted to this topic in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, but not only could it never *in principle* succeed (and Adorno's irrational misunderstanding of the phenomenological account of consciousness prevented him from seeing this), it was also effectively reversed by the culture industry itself after the 1960s, when new and more sophisticated productive processes made it possible to accommodate whatever market diversification happened to obtain.

The fundamental category of the artificial negativity version of Critical Theory remains *living subjectivity* as constitutive of both subject and object, thus encompassing both labor and interaction. As for that universality and binding necessity so highly prized by communication theory, it can be disposed of as a theological remnant, unnecessary in the age of postmodernity, where all universality deteriorates into pseudo-universality or into the ideology of another particularistic group and no claim is accepted as legitimate simply on the basis of its formal credentials. The historically-grounded character of theory subverts all efforts to nail truth down once and for all — even as an horizon apprehensible only through historical reflection. The same is true of foundations: like everything else, they wear out or crack and, from time to time, need to be rebuilt. They are neither prior to nor absolutely essential to theorizing: when and if they need work, they can be readily patched up to sustain whatever structure they happen to be under — provided sufficient subjectivity is available to undertake the task.

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The Power of the Press: Danny Gets the Goods

Russell A. Berman

Any readers of *Telos* who may have had the misfortune of seeing their subscription to *In These Times* lapse this spring are strongly encouraged to rush to their nearest bookstore or library to recover a copy of the *ITT* issue of April 24-30. For it is in no less a reputable organ of the public sphere that a rising star on the horizon of investigative journalism, Danny Postel, gets the goods on "the right turn in *Telos*," spills the beans on so-called Critical Theory, and emancipates the cat from the bag. With an intellectual perspicacity rarely seen in print (and, of course, never in the bourgeois press), Postel excoriates *Telos*' celebration of Heidegger's philosophy. With a nuanced sensitivity to facts worthy of the best traditions of left-wing journalism, he demolishes *Telos*' endorsement of Schmitt's politics. Like Horatio at the bridge, he single-handedly blocks the enemy and rescues the safe fields of the Left from the ideological vandals. Like the Dutch boy at the bursting dike, he has stuck his thumb — or his pen — into the hole and held back the ominous flood waters of political *Angst*. If only the German Left of the Weimar Republic had had a mind of this caliber and a stylist of this persuasive power — here rolled into one! — how much pain and suffering might have been averted. But with Danny Postel writing, we can rest assured that it can't happen here. He knows a fascist when he smells one and isn't afraid to say so. We all owe him our thanks for showing us what left-wing journalism can do.

For example, Postel pulls no punches in his exposé of *Telos*' embrace of Heidegger. A reviewer in the journal, one Paul Gottfried, had the audacity to suggest that the connection made by Victor Farias in his *Heidegger and Nazism* was less than convincing. Of course, Postel is well versed in the variegated influences of Heidegger's murky work on (in alphabetical order) Arendt, Derrida, Foucault, Marcuse, Merleau-Ponty, and Sartre (to name only a few of the culpable) and he has studied all of *Telos*' back issues with their noticeable lack of any positive engagement with Heidegger. But might not such an omission be pretextuous, a devious subterfuge to throw this Eliot Ness off the track? Danny smells a rat. Heidegger was Nazi; Heidegger was a philosopher; philosophers are Nazis, or at least Heideggerians are, and so is *Telos*. There are only two possibilities, as the investigator puts it with his characteristic flair for style and fine differentiations: "Heidegger — sidestep or goose step." We know the answer.

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To carry out their "right turn," the editors at *Telos* are too clever to praise Heidegger directly; they know all too well what sort of outcry would rise up from the angry masses. So, instead, they have tried to undermine his critics surreptitiously, a stab in the back of all that is good and decent and honest. But they were more cheeky with another "dubious rehabilitation," the discussion of that Nazi hack Carl Schmitt. To be sure, editors Piccone and Ulmen pretended to underscore Schmitt's sleazy politics, but again, Postel, like St. George with the Dragon, pierces to the heart. Not satisfied with such perfunctory political distancings, he knows that once a Nazi, always a Nazi, and that any reading of Schmitt, at least in *Telos*, can only lead straight to the *Führerbunker*. As a sign of his intellectual sophistication and generosity, he cites extensively from the reknowned Schmitt scholar Richard Wolin to prove his point. No wishy-washy ambiguities here.

This is perhaps Postel's greatest strength, the ability and courage to ignore details, complexities, or doubts that might blind a less scrupulous critic and prevent a clear black-and-white understanding: his is a fully enlightened prose. Thus Christopher Lasch is, for Postel, simply "another ex-leftist with an interesting political pedigree." Period. Renegades deserve no better. With such unfailing eloquence, Postel can courageously follow the hidden lines of ideological power: the Heritage Foundation funds *Policy Review*; having published in *Policy Review*, Gottfried publishes a review in *Telos*, a review — ah ha! — critical of a critic of Heidegger. Where others might have become bogged down in questions, Postel gets the connection right away and — what intellectual prowess! — never even mentions Gottfried's deeply antagonistic relation to the conservative establishment. Why should he, anyhow, especially since he has gotten the real scoop: *Telos* has invited Gottfried "into its editorial circle." And a scoop this is indeed, for Gottfried has never been announced as an editor nor does he attend regular editorial meetings — facts which testify to the transparent duplicity of this once left-wing journal still bashful about the political mortgages of its editors and their guilty associations. What luck that Danny does not work for the FBI!

But Postel is no velvet-gloved liberal. He knows when a well-placed *ad hominem* attack is called for, how to quote out of context, or where to insert unattributed accusations: some of the best writing the Left has produced since the *New Masses*. And in the same tradition, too: ideological deviation means selling out, and selling out means fascism. Intellectual niceties are all well and good, but sooner or later the nitpicking has to stop and the shooting begins. Lucky are those who have Danny on their side, not to mention the authority he has chosen to cite, Douglas Kellner, described as "philosopher and social critic who wrote for the journal before its turn to the right." At least part of the characterization is true — Kellner did write for the journal in the past — and Postel has judiciously chosen him as a source; he knows what story he wants to tell and knows which witnesses will corroborate it. Again, the power of his argument is dazzling. Where weaker spirits might have felt called upon to interview

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current editorial associates, Postel finds his witnesses among former contributors who have a vested interest in providing objective accounts *sine ira et studio*. And what does Postel have Professor Kellner testify in the court of Left-wing opinion? "Telos represents the collapse of a certain segment of the Left intelligentsia that renounced its leftism and moved to totally reactionary positions, and in so doing drove away all the intelligent and creative progressives who once formed the best of *Telos*. All that is left are a few embittered and alienated pseudo-intellectuals who focus their critique on their former comrades while Reagan and Bush have destroyed American democracy and now the Middle East." A sad situation indeed, but every cloud has its silver lining, and if the Judases in *Telos* stoop so low as to attack "their former comrades," there will always be stalwart men like Douglas Kellner, who have a greater sense of pride and righteous, if never self-righteous journalists like Danny Postel, the red pencil of political correctness, protecting the gullible American public from the seductions of German philosophy and ideological degeneracy.

But Postel is an honorable man. Casting his lot with the oppressed and downtrodden and at the gravest personal risk, he has spoken out neither for fame nor fortune, neither for personal gain nor cheap sensationalism. He has chosen instead to step forward bravely, pointing a finger and naming names, in order to warn us of a clear and present danger. "J'accuse," cries Postel, so let us recall once more the horrifying litany, the list of misdeeds, the evil lurking in the heart of the journal. *Telos* has given consideration to Schmitt. *Telos* has criticized Habermas. *Telos* has criticized a critic of Heidegger, which is certainly the same as a defense of Heidegger (and Heidegger's danger for the American mind has been well described by Allan Bloom, whom Postel must count as one of his own). Some editors of the journal expressed opposition to the Sandinista regime, doubts about feminism, and support for intervention against Iraq. On points such as these, there is no room for discussion whatsoever; these are the "totally reactionary positions" bemoaned by Kellner as quoted by Postel. Thank goodness there are still some critics who know right from wrong and Right from Left and have no room for doubts.

No doubts for Danny: Gottfried is a conservative, even though the conservative powers-that-be have dropped him; Piccone opposes Habermas, but both supported the Gulf War (a congruence embarrassing to both, no doubt). Postel deftly overlooks such complexities as just so much epiphenomena in order to grab onto the essence. Where can he go from here? His analytic capacity has already ushered him into the august pages of *In These Times*, but his eloquence and panache deserve at least *The Nation*. The sky's the limit, and if the stars are friendly and the winds of change blow well, a Democratic administration in Washington might value his irresistable logic and prosecutorial imagination in a reconvened HUAC. He's got what it takes.

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Stalinism in These Times

Maxy Beml

Although the typical Left press' depiction of major news stories normally partakes of a level of self-delusion rarely equalled in its "bourgeois" counterpart, its accounts of internal factional differences within the Left are almost always outrageous. Thus Trotskyists have generally been considered much more dangerous than Nazis — not to mention the "social-fascism" of the social-democrats. This Stalinist legacy has recently reappeared in the muddled ramblings of an incompetent, but "politically correct" reporter for *In These Times* in an article concerning *Telos* (April 24-30, 1991). By also publishing a picture of Marx's head superimposed on a photograph of Hitler, *In These Times* hopes to prevent its average reader from missing the point of this exposé. Consider the following traditionally Stalinist tactics:

Guilt by Association

Almost four years ago, in the Winter 1987-88 issue, *Telos* published a book review written by Paul Gottfried, a self-described "reactionary." *In These Times* has finally taken notice and now dubs him part of *Telos*' editorial circle (that Gottfried has never attended a single *Telos* editorial meeting, which are always open to guests of whatever political persuasion, could have been established by simply asking). Quite independently of whatever arguments Gottfried may have made, *In These Times* concludes: a) that he must be automatically wrong; and b) that *Telos* must therefore also be reactionary.[1]

Gottfried's review analyzed Victor Farias' mediocre book on Heidegger and demonstrated that Farias's thesis of a necessary connection between Heigegger's philosophy and politics fails. A course in Baby Logic could warn a reporter against concluding that the reviewer thereby agrees with Heidegger. At any rate, *Telos* has claimed, in various formats for over two decades, that Heidegger's politics and philosophy are untenable and theoretically vacuous. The two, however,

1. As fate would have it, a couple of years ago Paul Gottfried himself anticipated *In These Times* — apparently the Left is always a couple of years behind the Right — and suggested that there was a strong similarity between Piccone's politics and his own. The original reply to that suggestion, which was reprinted in the July 1989 issue of the *Telos Editors' Newsletter*, is appended here, along with Gottfried's recent clarification of his position, to further clarify how *Telos'* politics sharply differs from the Right as well as the "politically correct" Left.

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are not *necessarily* connected and his philosophy can be opportunistically linked to diverse political positions. A reporter of even modest ability might have consulted Paul Piccone and Alex Delfini, "Marcuse's Heideggerian Marxism," in *Telos* 6 [Fall 1970] and 18 years later, Russell A. Berman and Paul Piccone, "Hidden Agendas: the Young Heidegger and the Post-Modern Debate," in *Telos* 77 [Fall 1988]).

But, arguments aside, *In These Times* simply quotes an authority, Habermas, that Farias' argument is conclusive. Extraordinarily, Habermas plays the role in this article as a mark of Left orthodoxy. It is ironic that *Telos'* move away from Habermas and his American clones previously on the *Telos* editorial board is adduced as further evidence of a shift to the Right. In point of fact, *Telos'* break with Habermas and the Habermasians took place because of their political conformism, liberalism, academic opportunism and, more importantly (reminiscent of the split in *skra* earlier in this century) non-participation in the journal's everyday business. In a nutshell, the attack on Farias has nothing to do with *politics*, but only with intellectual sloppiness, philosophical incompetence, and journalism parading as political theory. Only ignorance and/or intellectual dishonesty could turn such material into proof of a hidden allegiance to fascism.

Thought Control

Standard Stalinist practice is to condemn any deviation from an orthodox line by hysterical allegations. *In These Times* thus found it irresistible to point out to its readers that Carl Schmitt, to whom *Telos* devoted a special issue, was a Nazi; as though it was ever denied by the published articles, as though it was not explicitly discussed and criticized, and finally, as though that statement removes the need to think about this subject any further.

Unable to establish the current correct Left political line on Schmitt, *In These Times* simply accepts uncritically the standard *liberal* criticism provided by Richard Wolin — an ex *Telos* editor who resigned over the journal's "audacity" to attempt to determine whether Schmitt may have had anything to say about political theory. *In These Times* chooses to overlook that the *Telos* reception of Schmitt was not only very critical, but focused on his criticism of liberalism from the viewpoint of *participatory* democracy. Wolin's unwarranted identification of Schmitt's concept of democracy with Max Weber's charismatic *ührer Demokratie* (a phrase never used by Schmitt -- even during his 1933-1936 Nazi period) is predicated on the liberal identification of *all* authentic democracy with only one of its particularly weak versions: that *representative* democracy privileged by burned-out ex-1968ers now turned liberals — something the Left has historically criticized as *de facto* thoroughly unrepresentative, partial to capitalist and New Class groups, and historically detrimental to common people's interests. *Telos'* position on such matters has been that, as in the case of many earlier illustrious reactionaries such as Plato, Hegel, Nietzsche, et. al., Schmitt also has something to contribute to a critical political theory which refuses to

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conform to predominant liberal platitudes. At any rate, an intelligent Right-wing political theorist is always preferable to a stupid Left-wing epigone. But maybe the very consideration of any intelligent Right-wing political theory weakens enforcement of Left dogmatism

Dogmatic Socialism

Although *In These Times* acknowledges that *Telos* has always been critical of orthodox Marxism, it assumes that "there was no question of its commitment to socialism." Proof of this consists of citing the fact that *Telos* once published a book by Landauer — an anarchist — and Labriola's *Socialism and Philosophy* — a devastating critique of the philosophical crudeness of 19th century socialism! At any rate, the pages of *Telos* have always welcomed attacks on every form of party politics, bureaucratic domination, and New Class ideologies. Finally, in light of recent developments in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, how could anyone still *uncritically* advocate "socialism"? In all its forms, it has turned out to be a new mode of domination, a system rooted in New Class privileges, and probably the most conservative form of social organization in the 20th century.

In These Times is a delusion of much earlier times. Even its editors, however, must by now be aware that Habermas supported the US intervention in the Gulf. Given Habermas' earlier function in the article as a paradigm of Left fidelity, it seems to weaken rather than support the claim that Piccone's same support for the war evidences fascistic desires in the journal. But why worry about consistency when it is more fun to argue *ad hominem* and report that ex-editors consider the present editor "vulgar" and "obnoxious"?

Last, but not least, while one might forgive *In These Times* for ignorance, incompetence and dogmatism, the same cannot be said for its lost sense of humor. When an obvious joke about the absurdity of being "Left," "Right," "in front," or "behind" is solemnly reported as a straight political position, is it surprising that in the rest of *In These Times* jokes and politics are equally indistinguishable?

Today, Marxism survives as an academic fashion firmly entrenched in literature departments, cultural studies programs, and various oppression studies. For those too tired to review a long and complex theoretical history or too bewitched by pseudo-radicalism, there is nothing less welcome than any news about the emperor's latest version of *haute couture*. When all the silliness about secret agents of the Moonies or hidden messages which, when played backwards, turn readers into rabid Nazis is set aside, the issue remains whether an orthodoxy based on an obsolete economic theory, a hopeless philosophy of history, a disastrous political strategy, and an unworkable concept of social planning can once and for all be forgotten.

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Appendix I

July 22, 1989

Dear Paul Gottfried:

I meant to write you as soon as I received the copy of your Horowitz-Collier review, but, as usual, all sorts of distractions led to postponements. At any rate, writing you meant dealing with a number of onerous topics requiring considerable clarification —hence a substantial chunk of time. So, accept my apology and stand ready to cough up a much bigger one.

After reading your piece, I am not sure whether, with friends like you, I really need any enemies. My response to charges of being an "incipient conservative," not to mention "a shadow reactionary," is, normally, a violent reconstitution of the accuser's facial anatomy or, in more scholarly contexts (and if the accuser is built like Mike Tyson or is heavily armed), a heated rebuttal to the charges. But to complicate things, here the accusation comes in the unlikely form of a compliment —and from someone whom I thought understood my position well. So, I must blame this "misunderstanding" on the poor quality of whatever controlled substance you were stuffing in your pipe when you wrote this, and try to set the record straight once and for all.

In my article on '68 I tried to make it very clear that the old notions of Left and Right no longer make any good political or theoretical sense and that, to reduce to either Left or Right positions which explicitly seek to move beyond them, leads to terrible misunderstandings. What does it mean to be a conservative today (incipient or otherwise)? Politically, it means to side cynically with predominant economic interests independent of principles (e.g., to continue advocating massive funding for a strong defense after Gorbachev's unconditional surrender, after it has become obvious that the sort of military Keynesianism largely responsible for US world hegemony and industrial might after WWII cannot do so any longer, and that even the covert social welfare functions of the defense budget mean, because of their exclusion from public scrutiny, waste, arbitrariness and corruption —down to the scientific establishment which, mostly as a result, has become another glamorous, but costly and inefficient bureaucracy). It means calling for a demagogic constitutional amendment to outlaw the burning of the flag while the meaning of responsible citizenship is constantly eroded by a disempowering administrative apparatus. It means paying lip service to religious *form* while completely disregarding whatever residual values still make sense today. It means calling for the outlawing of abortion while ignoring the disintegrating social forces that increasingly atomize women and overburden them with the full weight of reproductive responsibilities —responsibilities which are fundamentally *community* issues. It means calling for lower spending or the privatization of, e.g., educational institutions, which, without alternative strategies to guarantee some minimal universal education, translates into reproducing and extending existing inequalities by implicitly favoring privileged social strata.

I could go on with specifics but I do not think it is necessary. Rather, since

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you are a philosopher, it is best to provide a philosophical definition under which every particular instance can subsequently be subsumed. A conservative is someone who privileges objectified being over objectifying subjectivity, form over content, "what is" over "what should be," dead tradition over living social relations, the past over the future. Conservatives attempt to live off accumulated social, cultural and economic capital, ignoring that these entities can thrive effectively only if renovated, relived and reconstituted —which entails considerable alterations and occasionally qualitative breaks. Since to conserve is to constantly update and repair against the unavoidable erosion of time, the conservatives' natural passivity dooms them to gradual historical irrelevance —which explains why conservatism in the pre-20th century European sense of upholding a "natural" order makes absolutely no sense in the US where, as a result, conservatism —as you yourself pointed out in your own extremely useful and informative book on the subject, ends up including the most heterogeneous and motley bunch of unsavory characters —from the neo-cons to the religious fanatics in the New Right.

Question: can my own outlook be considered "conservative" in any of these senses or concerning any of these positions? Before answering this rhetorical question with the resounding "no" that it deserves, let me try to hypothesize why some people, including yourself, may occasionally be misled into thinking so: it has to do with my criticism of the scatterbrained American Left, whose outlook today has very little to do any longer with emancipation and radical change in the traditional sense, but, rather, has deteriorated to the ideology of the New Class of knowledge-capitalists. . . . .

Enough: does all this make me a conservative? What do I want to conserve, other than minimal sanity and integrity? As for the other, even more edifying compliment of being a "shadow reactionary," I do not understand what precisely I wish to go back to. If I defend the family, self-discipline, personal integrity, and social responsibility, does that mean I want to go back to . . . where? And why should not these values be part of a radical outlook? After all, historically, radical critiques have been to the effect that a) these values have been historically eroded and b) prevented from being practiced by pathological social relations.

One parting note: while I appreciate your effort to set the record straight as to the alleged homogeneous character of the New Left (in Buffalo we used to laugh about Black Panther groupies such as Colliers and Horowitz, and we never confused thugs with politically serious activists) I thought the whole review was much too mild for a fairly mediocre book. Paul Berman's review of the same book in *The New Republic* a couple of months ago, while at least three times as long as it should have been, was more accurate as far as a negative evaluation of these ex-New Leftists who today, under a conservative cover, keep perpetuating the same nonsense they did two decades ago by other means.

Regards,

Paul Piccone

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Appendix II

June 6, 1991

Dear Paul Piccone:

Postel's observations about the changing ideological orientation in *Telos* is questionable, but at least some of the remarks he ascribes to me are accurate. I did say that the KKK in its present decrepit condition seems less frightening than the managerial welfare state, which continues to grow and oppress. I have, furthermore, mocked the use of designated victim status by managerial equalizers to destabilize communities and control their members. Mine are not the views of the American Right or what now passes for one, a gaggle of Washington lobbyists and bureaucrats vying for government favors with an increasingly indistinguishable "Left." As I have stressed in numerous polemics, the battle between the current Right and the current Left is one between rival priesthoods of the managerial class. This should indicate the extent to which I differ from the authorized American Right. Clearly I have done so as a disenchanted *conservative* with conservative sentiments. But this residual loyalty has less and less to do with the social and political realities to which I address myself as a scholar. In this work I have benefited from *Telos*' Critical Theory, although I have applied it only selectively.

Postel's attribution to me of Heritage Foundation connections, on the basis of an essay in *Policy Review*, is laughable. The article to which he refers was published over the objections of the president, Edwin Feulner, and over those of at least one vice-president. The essay underscored the irreparable split between, on the one side, traditionalists and libertarians and, on the other, the Cold War liberals who had siezed the conservative movement and were controlling the Reagan administration.

For the record, I am not an editor of *Telos*, though my college hosted *Telos* conferences. Concerning my views on the inevitability of patriarchy, I have absolutely no fear that the managerial state will permanently upset human relations. The only harm the present system can do with regard to our natures is prescribe unisex homogeneity in the short run, which will not alter irreversibly gender identities or derivative social institutions. I am drawn to communitarian thinking not because of a desire to push around women, but because of my hope that communal and individual identities can survive the present order of things. I wish to see people living together again without having to take orders from either multinational corporations or the Equal Employment Commission.

Finally, I defy Daniel Postel to prove that I defended Heidegger's politics. In my *Telos* review I was attacking Victor Farias' sloppy and tendentious excuse for scholarship. Postel may not accept the underlying arguments in my review, but it was a critique of Farias and his fans, not a justification of Heidegger during the Third Reich, that I published in *Telos*.

Regards,

Paul Gottfried

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Reviews:

The Disharmony of the Spheres

Susan McClary, *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender, and Sexuality* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 220 pp.

As the academic reification of music goes on, it blithely severs this most affective and pervasive art from its roots in life and society. The privileged insight into musical essence is still pursued through the technical analyses of scores. The historical, social, political, and sexual dimensions of music are treated as anecdotes: context perhaps, but never content; the stuff for opening chapters on composers' "lives and times"; a humanistic prelude to an objective, scientific, Schenkerian analysis of a score understood as a primal *Ding an sich*. Against this pristine conception of music, Susan McClary's *Feminine Endings* argues "that music and its procedures operate as part of the political arena." The vaunted transcendence, nonrepresentational character, and absoluteness of the Western art music tradition, therefore, are nothing more than tokens of ideological conformity: "So long as music reaffirms what everyone expects, it can manage to seem apolitical, to serve as a mere frill" (27).

The seven essays collected in *Feminine Endings* continue the critique of an apolitical academic musicology, then go on to lay the foundations for an alternative, critical and feminist musicology. Despite the remarkable resistance of musicology to the more historical modes of analysis which have invaded the other humanistic disciplines, McClary identifies predecessors and contemporaries who share her desire to reconceive the study of music. She cites a number of prominent figures who constitute "that tiny cadre of American musicologists that has persistently advocated and practiced music criticism for the last thirty years" (173n). She recognizes Adorno as the pioneer who pierced the reified mystification of music by maintaining that it was "a medium within which the bourgeois contradictions between individual free will and social pressures to conform were played out. . . " (28).[1] And McClary now joins a

1. Nevertheless, McClary subjects Adorno to some scathing criticism. A similar attitude, partially appreciative of Adorno and partially critical from a postmodern perspective, pervades an earlier collection of essays which McClary co-edited. See Richard Leppert and Susan McClary, eds., *Music and Society: The Politics of Composition, Performance and Reception* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987). See also my review of this book: "Music, Postmodernism and Critical Theory," in *Telos* 77 (1988), pp. 165-70. McClary cites a number of prominent figures in musicology who constitute "that tiny cadre of American musicologists that has persistently advocated and practiced music criticism for the last thirty years" (p. 173n). She places Edward T. Cone, Joseph

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significant minority of musicologists who have given Adorno's critical project a feminist direction. But this attempt to redeem Adorno as part of the postmodern project generates its own problems.

Even though Adorno is credited as the founder of critical musicology, McClary's conceptual language eschews Adornian Critical Theory. Rather, her concepts are distinctly postmodern, Foucauldian, and semiotic. Against the tradition that music is a unified phenomenon, McClary posits the existence of "musical discourses" (5) or musics. Music is "constructed" (59) rather than composed; the history of music is an inherited "semiotic code" (19); the cultural context of music is "a variety of social discursive practices" (150); the political meaning of music is embedded in the "narrative" (12) of tonal structure. This jargon of postmodern authenticity can be grating, but its ultimate effect is salutary to the extent that it resocializes the phenomena of music.

The real issue here is not McClary's methodological allegiances, but the substance of her postmodern critical musicology as she shifts away from class, i.e., away from Adorno's "bourgeois contradictions," and towards gender. After an introductory overview of her thesis, the first three essays explore the gender construction of works in the classical canon. The final three examine contemporary attempts to form an alternative music by women who are composers/performers. Although occasionally tending toward overstatement, McClary's critiques of musical classicism are models of what a politicized perspective can contribute to the understanding of music. The last essays are more problematic. Here the sheer eclecticism of postmodernism weakens her project.

McClary's feminism politicizes some of the heretofore depoliticized icons of the classical canon: Monteverdi's operas, *Carmen* and Tchaikovsky's Fourth Symphony, Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, and the depiction of operatic madwomen. Focus on music with verbal texts allows her gender politics of music to bear a kinship to other feminist scholarship. But the distinctive aspect of McClary's critique of classicism is her ability to analyze the gender politics of musical scores. She demonstrates not only a "politicized" approach to the analysis of musical scores, but a necessary role for such analysis as a moment within a critical musicology.

While her analysis of opera is often insightful, the liability of her feminism can also be illustrated by a brief look at her treatment of Monteverdi's operas. As the first masterworks of the genre, there have been numerous studies of the musical, poetic, dramatic, and philosophical aspects of these works, most conducted in a socio-political vacuum. In McClary's analysis, Monteverdi's first opera,

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Kerman, Leonard B. Meyer, Charles Rosen, Maynard Solomon, and Leo Treitler in this "tiny cadre." Richard Norton's *Tonality in Western Culture: A Critical and Historical Perspective* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1984) should be added to this list. This book assaulted the most hypostatized bastion of musicology, tonal theory. By defining tonality as "a decision made against the chaos of audible nature" (p. x), Norton stripped tonality of its naturalistic and metaphysical pretensions, and restored it as a manifestation of human subjectivity and social relations.

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La Favola d'Orfeo (1607), is more than a mere apolitical pastoral based on antique models. It is rather an instructive essay in late Renaissance-early Baroque gender stereotyping. McClary argues that the work's unpopularity in Monteverdi's time probably resulted from the excessive emotionality of Orfeo's character, represented in his propensity toward the musical forms of seduction and lament. These forms violated patriarchal expectations about appropriate masculine behavior. Until Orfeo's divine apotheosis with his father Apollo at the end of the work, Orfeo is a character who acts like a "feminized male" (39-48). Here McClary's feminism adds an awareness of gender issues which is fully compatible with other attempts to interpret this work politically.[2]

But McClary's analysis of Monteverdi's last opera, *L'Incoronazione di Poppea* (1642), loses the delicious ambiguity which is the genius of this work. The opera revolves around the emperor Nero's successful attempt to divorce his wife Ottavia and marry Poppea, an ambitious young noblewoman. The opera concludes with one of the greatest hits of early Baroque opera: a triumphant duet of love and lust between Nero and Poppea. *Poppea* inverts the contradictory gender construction of *Orfeo*: now it is the scorned empress Ottavia who laments; and it is the wily Poppea who practices the stereotypically female musical rhetoric of seduction. McClary is right to observe how the opera depicts the political ambition which underlies Poppea's love and desire for Nero. But in her effort to portray Poppea as an archetype of the patriarchal image of the dangerous female seducer, she misses the readily apparent ambivalence of Nero. While he is obviously smitten by Poppea, it is also clear that his quest for her has become the token of his absolutist desire to remove the constraints of morality and tradition on the emperorship. Hence, both Nero and Poppea mix their eros with a large dose of politics.

Likewise, McClary's feminism induces her to detect the patriarchal morality, but not the full ambiguity, of the concluding scene. Again, she is right to assert that the historically erudite Venetian opera audiences would have supplemented the scene of Poppea triumphant with a knowledge of her ultimate fate: the scheming seducer died from Nero's kick to her stomach while she was pregnant. But this same audience would be no less cognizant of the triumphant Nero's own ignominious fate: the absolutist emperor, disdainful of Roman morality and tradition, pathetically botched his own suicide at the time of his overthrow. Whether the opera's concluding depiction of the triumph of morally compromised characters is the product of a nascent Venetian republican critique of absolutism, foreshortened by the Baroque desire for political stability,[3] or whether it is nothing more than a grand example of humanist tolerance,

2. For example, I recently argued that Orfeo is a representation of the political education of a Baroque prince. At the end of the opera, Orfeo is transformed from an accessible, beloved, and emotional princeling to a remote, admired, and rational neo-Platonic ruler. See John Bokina, "Deity, Beast, and Tyrant: Images of the Prince in the Operas of Monteverdi," *International Political Science Review*, No. 12 (1991), pp. 51-55.

3. *Ibid.*, pp. 59-63.

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McClary's focus on the moral culpability of Poppea alone misses the ambiguity of the opera, and thus the source of its continuing fascination.

But McClary's interpretation of operatic texts and structures is not as crucial as her reinterpretation of the familiar structure, the "narrative," of Western music. Epitomized by sonata form, the bare facts of this structure are not in dispute. In very simple terms, sonata form involves the sequential presentation of a principal theme and key, followed by a secondary theme and key, where these secondary elements are understood as relatively weak and passive. After an interval of development and mixture, the composition is resolved by a restatement of the tonal material within the parameters of the principal theme and key.

For mainstream musicology, the pattern is explained by the laws of classical tonality, laws whose ultimate foundation resides in the qualities of tones understood as natural phenomena. But for Adorno and a few others working on a critical theory of music, the struggle between the primary and secondary themes and keys is a representation of bourgeois society, and thus the musical-dialectical counterpart to the highest achievements in philosophy (Hegel) and social theory (Marx).[4]

McClary rejects not only the formalism of mainstream interpretations, but also the interpretation of Adorno and company. For her, the pattern of struggle between the primary and secondary elements is not an embodiment of musical enlightenment and possible emancipation. Rather, the secondary elements represent an Other who is to be conquered and dominated by the European, white, male world which defines the primary elements. The tendency of composers and traditional musicologists to call the secondary elements "feminine" leads McClary to assume that in music the Other is primarily women. But the musical establishment is not the only purveyor of this ethnocentricism, racism, and sexism. It pervades classical Critical Theory as well. Based on his work on jazz and popular music, McClary castigates Adorno for his denigration of "pleasure of the body" (29; see also 200n), and for his racism and fear of castration (65, 186n, 206n). Poor Teddy! Twenty-two years after his death, women are still refuting his ideas by guerrilla attacks on his sexuality.

By her repeated references to Adorno's jazz and pop essays, McClary obviously believes that she is focusing on some scholarly Freudian slips which reveal the hidden political underside of Adorno's *oeuvre*. But sometimes a cigar is just a cigar, and sometimes odd little essays are just odd little essays. Rather than taking Adorno's essays on jazz and popular music as the simultaneous products of both his hostility to the culture industry and his ignorance of these

4. For a discussion of Adorno's views, see Susan Buck-Morss, *The Origins of Negative Dialectics: Theodor W. Adorno, Walter Benjamin, and the Frankfurt Institute* (New York: Free Press, 1977), pp. 132-35. See also Christopher Ballantine, "Beethoven, Hegel and Marx," *The Music Review*, No. 33 (1972), pp. 34-46, and Norton, *Tonality in Western Culture*, *op. cit.*, pp. 198-211.

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musical forms,[5] McClary bludgeons the entire enterprise of classical Critical Theory on the basis of some of its weakest works.

What, then, is the alternative? McClary recognizes that if there is to be a genuinely feminist music — i.e., a genuine alternative to the domination, ethnocentrism, racism, and sexism of Western music — this will not primarily be a matter of verbal texts, or even of the biological gender of composers and performers. Rather, this feminist music will have to offer an alternative to the domination inherent in the very structure of Western music itself.

At the end of her chapter on operatic madwomen, McClary offers a first, brief glimpse of a feminist alternative. In her portrayal of a madwoman, performance artist Diamanda Galas uses "the ululation of traditional Mediterranean keening" and "whispers, shrieks, and moans" as the musical means to protest against the Greek junta and maltreatment of AIDS victims (110). The last three chapters extend the range of possible feminist musics. A piece by composer Janika Vandervelde juxtaposes two simultaneous musical lines. A repetitive, "clockwork" pattern on the piano is associated with the fetal heartbeat, birth, the timeless cycles of nature: i.e., the music of women. At the same time the strings play "the goal-oriented gestures of self-expression and striving" (119) that typify Western music: men's music. The music of Laurie Anderson's multimedia, high-tech performance pieces admittedly use the traditional tonal vocabulary of Western music. But McClary maintains that this traditional appearance is an illusion, that Anderson subverts the traditional pattern by eliminating the hierarchical relation between keys and chords. Finally, and surprisingly, Madonna is offered as an exemplar of musical feminism. While her leather outfits and bullet bras might seem to be the epitome of sexist-patriarchal gender stereotyping, McClary attributes a self-conscious and critical intent to Madonna's music and performances. Her music grasps "the assumptions embedded within these basic musical mechanisms and is audaciously redirecting them" (161). And her music videos appropriate and redefine "conventional codes" (155).

The degree to which McClary's exemplars of feminist music constitute a genuine alternative to the Western tradition is suspect. The music of Galas, Vandervelde, and Anderson is what Hegel would call a sheer negation whose very claim to innovation is still determined by the thesis of the Western tradition. The works of these artists may be way stations on the road to a genuine musical alternative, but they do not yet constitute this alternative. As for Madonna, I find McClary's claims for innovation somewhat fanciful. I suspect that Madonna's slight redirection of musical mechanisms and her redefining appropriation of conventional codes have more to do with securing her highly profitable niche in the pop culture industry than they do with any feminist redirection of music.

It appears that the only things which unify this eclectic collection are a) the

5. See Ulrich Schönherr, "Adorno and Jazz: Reflections on the History of a Failed Encounter," in this issue.

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gender of the artists and their interpreter, and b) some measure of departure from the traditional musical structure. McClary is aware that biological gender does not in itself constitute an alternative (112-16). Yet no small part of the force of her argument depends upon the fact that she is a female musicologist discussing works by female artists. I can easily imagine the hue and cry that would result if a male writer had asserted that feminist music consists of the ululating keening of a madwoman, the musical representation of childbirth, a slight variation in the tonal vocabulary of electronic music, or Madonna dancing in a peepshow. If McClary's feminist music is not quite the alternative that she claims, her politics is even more conformist. Throughout the book, there is a clear sense of a radical partisanship of the oppressed: McClary versus the musicological establishment; McClary's feminist artists versus the sexism of traditional composition and performance practices. Yet there are also occasional but telling hints that this radical partisanship coexists with an antipathy to revolutionary politics. Except for the Adagio in the third movement, McClary portrays Beethoven's Ninth Symphony — from Bakunin to Bloch, heralded as the musical apotheosis of the revolutionary spirit — as an exercise in violence and sexism (127-30). In her discussion of Schoenberg, we learn that revolution is a "properly masculine business" (105). Instead of the old, masculinist associations of radicalism with real political change, McClary's feminist radicalism prescribes nothing more substantial than images of "ecstatic stasis" (132) and "of the hope for survival within available discursive practices" (163).

Conceived in the narrow terms of skin color and genital structure, radical discourse in the nineties becomes a matter of rumors about Colin Powell's vice-presidential prospects and debates about female POWs and KIAs. The simple lesson of Marx's little essays on the Jewish question — that emancipation is not a question of *who* is emancipated, but of *what* this emancipation consists of — is drowned in the fashionable dialect of postmodernism. Neither feminism in general nor McClary in particular is responsible for this evisceration of radicalism. But McClary's politicized analysis of politicized music does raise serious questions about the character of this politicization.

John Bokina

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Racial Politics and the City

Jim Sleeper, *The Closest of Strangers: Liberalism and the Politics of Race in New York* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1990), 355 pp.

Racial conflicts have intensified since the 1960s. Following decades of rhetorical progress and selective prosperity, today racism among both whites and blacks, plus increasing racial isolation and impoverishment among minorities, documents the failure of liberalism. Race has reemerged as the great stumbling block of American politics. But are race and racism really the main issues? Can the breakdown of cities such as New York be interpreted, as white liberals and black leaders often do, as due to ". . . oppressed people of color and unthinking white oppressors who must constantly be confronted with the evil of their banality"?[1]

Clearly, confrontations interpreted as racial have been on the rise. White youths killed a black teen in the Bensonhurst section of Brooklyn in the summer of 1989 on the pretext of territorial invasion. The vicious gang rape of a 29-year old investment banker in Central Park by some black kids on a "wilding" rampage was depicted by the media as a racial assault — a media which systematically ignores rapes of black women. During the trial some black parents and bystanders accused the judicial system of racism, evoking counter racial charges.[2] In Valley Stream, Long Island, just across the border from the black sections of Queens and Brooklyn, black patrons at one of the 14-screen movie complex had a shootout during an opening-day screening of "The Godfather III" which killed one person. As a result, whites have practically stopped patronizing the movie complex, notwithstanding the fact that the theater has installed metal detectors, making the entry lounge resemble that of an airport. During March, network news repeatedly showed an amateur videotape of Los Angeles cops beating a black man on the street where they had stopped his car following a chase. And at Cornell University and CUNY, black and Hispanic students occupied administration buildings to protest tuition increases or cutbacks in subsidies which pay some or all of their expenses. Such actions, resembling earlier welfare

1. See also Jonathan Rieder's *Canarsie* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985) highlights how racism is constructed through liberal politics. For other recent accounts of race and black life in America, see Shelby Steele, *The Content of Our Character* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990); William Julius Wilson, *The Truly Disadvantaged* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1987); Elijah Anderson, *Streetwise* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1990); Nicholas Lemann, *The Promised Land* (New York: Al;fred E. Knopf, 1991); and Alex Kotlowitz, *There are No Children Here* (NY: Doubleday, 1991).

2. For a discussion of these events, see Joan Didion, "New York: Sentimental Journeys," *New York Review of Books*, Vol. 38, Nos 1 and 2 (January 17, 1991).

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protests, have highlighted a racial dependence on public entitlements.[3]

Racial minorities today are concentrated in metropolitan areas. Recent studies of census data reveal that 50% of the nation's urban black population live in racially-segregated neighborhoods in the nation's 50 largest metropolitan areas. In New York City, minorities are now the majority. Non-Hispanic blacks make up 25.2% with Hispanics pushing close at 24.4% of the city's population. At the same time, there seems to be a corresponding increase in the suffering, despair, and violence among blacks and Hispanics, especially the young whose lives seem devoid of either hope or responsibility.[4]

Black youth growing up in urban ghettos are victims and aggressors in the despair, crime, and violence that surrounds them. Referring to black children in the Bronx and Harlem, a newspaper headline emphasized that "despair is engulfing a generation in New York."[5] These days the only safe place for children are the schools. There, however, the likelihood of boredom, parental neglect and mindless educational programs generate high rates of school dropouts. Thus school reform has emerged as a major public project to rescue children in urban ghettos. Yet it is not clear that public schools can compete with the allure of street gangs, drugs and easy (if risky) money, basketball and sneakers, or rap music. Not even Spike Lee, that mandarin of black achievement, seems aware of the contradiction between his sneaker-celebrity life-style ads and his recent ad of Michael Jordan and himself sitting in a classrooom with an admonition to "stay in school."

Is this a new era of racism? Sleeper offers a challenging yet contradictory analysis of how New York's racial antagonisms arise through a post-1960s liberalism which instrumentalized politics and law for race-specific advancement. Relying on a more traditional liberalism that he claims once prevailed in New York (now labelled "neoconservatism" by the Right, and articulated as the ideology of civil society by the social-democratic Left), Sleeper depicts the opportunistic politics of racial advancement and resentment. Taking on New York's

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3. *The New York Times* is a major source for a popular interpretation that race relations continually reflect racism: see, e.g., "Racism and the Young: Some See a Rising Tide," *New York Times* (August 27, 1989), A32; "L.I. Cinema is Battleground of Geography and Psychology," *New York Times* (March 29, 1991), B1; "Unresolved: Role of Race in Law Class Admissions," *New York Times* (April 28, 1991), E5; and "When Blacks Shop, Bias Often Accompanies Sale," *New York Times* (April 30, 1991), A1. Cf. also films about blacks, such as Spike Lee's "Do the Right Thing" dealing with racial conflict in Brooklyn.

4. "Now Whites are Minority in New York," *New York Times* (March 22, 1991), B1; and for a broader view, see Andrew Hacker, "Trans-National America," *New York Review of Books* (November 22, 1990).

5. "How Despair is Engulfing a Generation in New York," *New York Times* (April 2, 1989), E6. See also Nicholas Lemann, "Four Generations in the Projects," *New York Times Magazine* (January 13, 1991); Kotlowitz, *op. cit.*; John Valenti with Ron Naclerio, *Swee'pea and Other Playground Legends* (New York: Michael Kesend, 1991); and Arthur Kempton's excellent review of recent books on black youth, "Native Sons," *New York Review of Books* Vol. 38, No. 7 (April 11, 1991).

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racial establishment, he accurately depicts how a politics of racial advancement and resentment is shaped without any regard for civility or assimilation into mainstream practices. In a provocative thesis, he claims that New York's racial crisis is politically constructed by a wrong-headed racial agenda and has resulted in the "decay of opportunity, authority, and civility for a growing number of New Yorkers and the ascendancy of force and fraud in the calculations of their everyday lives" (17).[6]

Sleeper blames New York's racial crisis on professional activists who, by allegedly promoting the interests of oppressed minorities, actually enhance their careers and undermine the city's universalistic liberal traditions.[7] Without irony, Sleeper proposes traditional liberalism as the solution to the racial crisis precipitated by New Class liberalism. In other words, the racial crisis is real, but is caused less by racism *per se* than by a particular post-liberal politics which makes race its central category. This purely racial theory of politics, Sleeper claims, only ends up as a self-fulfilling prophecy. It perpetuates black dependence as a result of an ideology of oppression and entitlement, generates racial resentments on both sides, and contributes to the erosion of assimilationist politics. Believing that America will not tolerate any form of racial politics, Sleeper suggests that racism is not an indigenous factor in popular American life and argues that only a transracial politics of assimilation into the universalism of American culture can address the issues.

At the heart of the problem is a generation of Left-liberal activists, white and black, who abandoned the earlier tradition of civil rights based on the indigenous black community and federal enforcement to guarantee equality of opportunity. This generation also abandoned earlier anti-poverty programs which, in one interpretation, stressed that the pathologies of black life in northern ghettos were associated with the decline of the black community, church, and family, and thus, were not merely the result of poverty or racism. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s this liberal generation increasingly embraced racial theories of oppression from which they advocated the idea of preferential treatment for minority groups. Various social engineering schemes, court rulings, and public sector programs were deployed to expedite the racial integration of housing, schools, and workplaces, and to facilitate the upward mobility of blacks through the imposition of proportional quota.

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6. Here Sleeper follows Lewis Mumford, Louis Wirth, Jane Jacobs, Richard Sennett, etc., in assumming that, by compacting people in dense quarters, cities have traditionally fostered communal and civil traditions. A nostalgic interpretation of the fall of the city, paralleling that of Sleeper, is Richard Sennett's recent *The Conscience of the Eye* (New York: Alfred E. Knopf, 1991).

7. The more general problem of the New Class has most recently been taken up by Paul Piccone and G. L. Ulmen, "Schmitt's 'Testament' and the Future of Europe," *Telos* 83 (Spring 1990), and their "Four Exchanges," *Telos* 85 (Fall 1990); Christopher Lasch, *The True and Only Heaven* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1991); and Charles Derber et. al., *Power in the Highest Degree* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990).

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As Julius Wilson has persuasively argued, liberal racial policies have only benefitted more advantaged minority members who reap disproportionate benefits from policies of preferential treatment.[8] The very institutional apparatus staffed by New Class liberals to advance racial interests — schools and colleges, welfare agencies, development corporations, courts, and the like — are often expanded to provide jobs for affirmative action minorities promoted by those very institutions. The post-civil rights and post-poverty era of racial politics is thus rooted in the expansionist agenda of the bureaucratic New Class, whose interests as paternalistic agents of social management are well served by theories of racial oppression and advancement.

The measures suggested by these theories have not substantially helped the black poor and have often alienated both black and white lower-middle classes still subscribing to the importance of ordinary labor, not entitlements, and the moral virtues of trust and responsibility associated with family and church, not the government or the courts. These measures, however, sent a message to minorities that they could exploit the theme of racial oppression and obtain social entitlements without engaging the necessary, often mundane, requirements of self-determining motivation and responsibility as well as sustaining their organic connection to family and community. Sleeper reports how white liberals formed alliances with black professional activists and ghetto hustlers under the ideological framework of racial emancipation by legally mandating the integration of schools and neighborhoods and through other social entitlement programs. According to him: "That spelled disaster for socially conservative, low-income blacks, who needed a great deal of support for their practical moral decency in order to survive" (33).[9]

Moreover, by disrupting the cultural patterns of traditional neighborhoods, whose moral codes are based on culturally-specific and territorial relations rather than abstract universal rights, such programs angered the white lower middle class in Queens and Brooklyn neighborhoods, generating racial hatred that New York's older traditions had been able to keep in check. Especially troubling to a lot of people are attempts by racial politicians to morally justify illegal and obscene behavior by blacks, openly flaunting conventionally decent notions of wrongdoing, responsibility, and civil reciprocity.

The apotheosis of this race drama is now reached in black cultural nationalism and identity politics, including multicultural racial pedagogy, promoted by professional race activists.[10] Such cultural politics reflects the school-based institutional power of the New Class. Gone are earlier concepts of the black community advocated by the southern civil rights movement or the Muslims where the idea of community has socially-constitutive components — i.e., organic relations

8. *The Declining Significance of Race* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980).

9. Cf. Rieder's study of the liberal invasion in *Canarsie*, *op. cit.*

10. or critiques of this, see Steele, *op. cit.*; Paul Piccone, "Artificial Negativity as an Artificial Tool?," *Telos* 86 (Winter, 1990-91); and Fred Siegel, "The Multicultural Cult," *The New Republic* (February 18, 1991).

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among family, work practices, spiritual beliefs and the church, neighborhood relations, and political activities.[11] In the New Class-mediated version of black culture, the emphasis is on the artificial production of racial identity and self-esteem in educational environments where minority teachers can function as role-models rather than heroes. The tragic yet heroic struggles of King Lear or Martin Luther King give way to the mass-mediated antics of Bill Cosby or Spike Lee. Reflecting the therapeutic and behavioristic thinking of bureaucratic professionals, the call for raising self-esteem through racial identity and pedagogy bypasses conventional identity-formation processes associated with family and community life. A non-political politics is thus created which legitimates management practices and sets up black-separatist schools which can be used for patronage purposes, as vehicles for more group promotion and mobility.

As Sleeper argues, New York's racial politics is self-defeating and undemocratic, more a contributor to racism than a solution. However, he errs in assuming that race must be completely transcended in community and politics, and replaced with New York's supposed tradition of pluralist assimilation. Sleeper believes that race cannot be used as a basis for politics because it violates the moral core of the American pluralist and assimilationist traditions. Groups can only advance their interests by acting responsibly and by participating in the consensual norms of pluralist politics. Violations of this tradition produce "backlashes" which generate counter-racial antagonisms. To be successful, black activists and liberals ". . . would have to speak not of reparations to their own group but of interracial strategies to expand the size of the pie. . . ." (228). Once purely racial barriers have been removed from voting, education, housing, and employment, then there are no further grounds for advancing blacks as a racial group through victimology and preferential treatment.

This sharp separation of race and politics is shared by two other popular approaches to the question. The first, argued most persuasively by Julius Wilson, is that the problem of blacks is class rather than race: the movement of industrial jobs from cities and the transformation of post-industrial occupations creates an underclass of socially-marginal people. While racism looms abstractly in the historical background, racial discrimination is not seen as a major part of this process. The solutions are, therefore, social-democratic policies of redistributing resources. The second transracial model, argued recently by Shelby Steele, reduces the problem to the "content of character," a non-politics of responsible, goal-motivated individualism. Both the political-economic and character models, however, have little to say about communitarian mediations of economic and character changes, and thus end up relying, respectively, on the undemocratic power of state and will.

Sleeper avoids these issues through a model of civil society that he identifies

11. This is from Lasch's populist account of the civil rights movement, *op. cit.*, pp. 386-398. Cf. also C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya, *The Black Church in the African American Experience* (Durham, N. C.: Duke University Press, 1990).

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with New York City's liberal traditions of ethnic communal and neighborhood life, individual responsibility, tolerance of cultural diversity, and urban political pluralism. These urban, civil traditions, he claims, were built by successive waves of immigrants as they worked out patterns of self-help and reciprocity to empower themselves to be successful and mobile in this century's expanding commercial and industrial economies. A socially-dense and diverse city requires community membership which enhances self-discipline and interpersonal responsibility, where codes of living are created and enforced which have no particular ethnic or racial cast.

As he writes, New York was successful in "creating an unusual culture of institutions — public, collective, and universal — which sought to link the poor city dweller's personal mobility to a broader cosmopolitan purpose" (72). While initially starting out in ethnic-based communities, the new citizens fashioned urban civil associations — schools, municipal politics and patronage, commercial trade associations, unions, parks and public rituals including sports — which transformed them into Americans. The moral essence of this urban "melting pot" was communitarian, linking the individual to society as an American.[12]

Contrary to the racial politicos who have contributed to the destruction of New York's civil traditions, Sleeper argues that race cannot be the defining essence of public life since it presupposes a tribalism which contradicts American values. While clear on the need to prevent race from entering politics, he is ambivalent on the role of race in the formation of communities and personal identity, suggesting on occasion that race cannot be used as a basis for group belonging or identity, and on others that the black experience can be cultivated within private life to enhance these things. We are down to the root of the matter: should blacks divest themselves of their race and become Americans participating in a universal, modern culture? Again, Sleeper claims that race must go.

Blacks, as citizens, with or without other social groups, must build their own institutions. This is, of course, a major challenge in Northern cities because of the difficulty blacks have had in sustaining families and churches in urban ghettos. As an example of "civil society," Sleeper praises the efforts of the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF), which is less an indigeneous community association than a product of the late Saul Alinsky in his efforts to "organize" Chicago neighborhoods so that citizens could place demands on municipal authorities. Of course, Sleeper is correct in his observation that "precisely because it reweaves the fabric of society among political moderates in their families, churches, and community centers, the IAF model, though sometimes brusque and formulaic,

12. Sleeper's use of the liberal concept of civil society idealizes civic associations as socially *sui generis,* as the communitarian otherness of a contractually-rational society, and as the indigenous product of dense cities like New York. This is different from the populist view that civic associations are grounded in productivist practices and particular group traditions vulnerable to capitalist rationalization and New Class management practices. On this distinction, see Lasch, *op. cit.*; and Paul Piccone and G. L. Ulmen, "Schmitt's 'Testament' and the Future of Europe: Four Exchanges," *op. cit.*, pp. 93-148.

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is dialectical in a way ideologues with all the answers can never be. More effective than most black nationalists and activists on the left . . . the IAF groups have brought tens of thousands of New Yorkers from apathy to constructive, confrontational engagement with elected officials. . . ." (39-40). Based on black churches but open to all in the neighborhoods, IAF deracializes politics, imposes discipline on its members, and makes demands on municipal authorities. To some extent, IAF in New York is an example of "artificial negativity" superimposed on struggling racial groups by non-racial organizers so that people can function as citizens in the minimal pluralist sense — empower themselves to demand consideration from city hall. This is the "good" liberalism that Sleeper counterposes to the "bad" liberalism of affirmative action advocates.

Complementing the voluntary associations in Sleeper's non-racial "civil society" are the schools which play a central role in his vision of individual mobility into the universalism of modern society. Examples of this "good" liberalism are schools which promote access to universal culture — technological and white collar — versus the "bad" liberalism which advocates cultural nationalism. Sleeper claims it is wrong for blacks to pose the false distinction between a defense of their black culture (which he does not think is a racial culture anyway) and oppose it to a white-dominated, Eurocentric culture. The notion of schools imposing a white, Eurocentric and thus racist culture on students is wrong because the better schools reflect the priorities of the new global economy predicated on transnational circulation of commodities, high-tech and formally-rational communication in English.

Sleeper is correct in his critique of black nationalist schooling and global, post-modern trends. But are schools, however understood, the appropriate solution for poor or working class black students (or any other group for that matter)? Sleeper buttresses this claim by arguing that "the fastest growing jobs will be in professional, technical and sales fields requiring the highest education and skills. . . ." (228). This is not necessarily true, but he must make the claim to be consistent with his "good" liberalism. Promoting the global economy as the goal to which all must aspire because of its presumed universalism only obscures how this corporate economy shapes a division of labor, regions, and politics which is so profoundly unequal that it itself must be seen as the cause of the difficulties many urban residents face. Now Sleeper indulges in the naiveté of the Lee-Jordan advertisement admonishing youngsters to "stay in school."[13]

One of the unresolved problems in this "good" liberal analysis is that race and group loyalties do matter and cannot be so easily erased. Another is that civil associations and virtue can only function in self-determining communities,

13. For an analysis of the relation of the global economy to an unequal occupational division of labor, see Robert Reich, *The Work of Nations* (New York: Alfred E. Knopf, 1991). For more descriptive accounts of income inequality, middle class decline , and urban enclaving, see Kevin Phillips, *The Politics of Rich and Poor* (New York: Random House, 1990); Lasch, *op. cit.*, pp. 479-486; and Mike Davis, *City of Quartz* (New York: Verso, 1990).

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work practices and proprietorship. A third is that an exclusive politics of schooling shrouds the increasing class and distributive issues that confront many in today's post-city civilization that America has become.

Why does race matter? First of all, Sleeper's model of the New York liberal tradition is overly consensual and pluralist. Historically, New York, like other large industrial cities that accepted waves of immigrants, was not necessarily a "melting pot." Ethnic immigrants normally lived in their own neighborhoods with intense feelings of in-group territorialism, frequently shared by the second generation. Nativist Protestants often clashed violently with new immigrant groups from Europe as the latter clashed with Asians, Hispanics, and blacks. The party organizations which grew in these culturally-competitive environments did not offer an abstract citizenship, but power and patronage linked to ethnic and territorial affiliations. What emerged in American cities was neither a struggle of capital and labor nor pluralist assimilation (at least not within the first generation), but a politics of competition and confederation between ethnic-territorial communities. While electoral majorities were occasionally constructed through blocs of ethnic groups, the essence of the urban municipal process in this earlier era was that politically active and loyal ethnic groups were rewarded with the prizes of patronage and city services.[14]

This actual experience of "civil society" functioned to complement and legitimate the capitalist division of labor and to shape a local politics as intergroup competition for municipal rewards. While this no doubt entailed a "civilizing process" of disciplined reciprocity that Sleeper claims for the liberal tradition, it did so within fairly strict ethnic and political confines.

The point is that ethnic and racial communities are relevant to identity and politics. Moreover, the liberal tradition hides the fact that many ethnic groups prospered in America not by making demands on city hall, meritocratic schooling, or pluralist assimilation, but through commercial proprietorship which often reflected specific ethnic traditions and often led to monopolistic forms of control. The Korean domination of retail grocery stores in New York is but a recent example of this long-standing ethnic tendency. That past ethnic groups prospered and successfully entered the American mainstream is also a testimony to the strength of particular groups and entrepreneurial traditions interacting in the dynamic economy of cities.

Civil society is not sufficient in the mobilization of identity, motivation, and virtue as is claimed by the progressive tradition that Sleeper represents. Ethnicity and race, religion, neighborhood or territorial homelands, family and friends, and economic practices have always been more morally compelling than universal civil traditions. Yet, as Lasch has argued with reference to the civil rights movement, there was a dialectic of particular and general that ensured the success

14. Ira Katznelson, *City Trenches: Urban Politics and the Patterning of Class in The United States* (New York: Pantheon, 1981); and Todd Swanstrom, *The Crisis of Growth Politics: Cleveland, Kucinich, and the Challenge of Urban Populism* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1985).

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of the movement in destroying discriminatory barriers. On the one hand, the Civil Right Movement grew out of specific black cultural traditions nurtured in their segregated associations of church, family, small businesses and schools. These particularistic traditions of a racial and lower middle class nature were a source of hope, courage and discipline against resentment and envy. On the other hand, the movement succeeded because it viewed itself as the conscience of a broader community of Christians which it sought to mobilize so that whites would accord the same rights to blacks that they themselves expect.[15]

In this interpretation, race *is* significant as a constituent of community. Understood in terms of communitarian infrastructure, it was the means for blacks to organize politically to demand inclusion in basic American constitutional rights. Such a community-based politics is neither the same as the contemporary "politics of race" nor the liberal, civil society alternative advocated by Sleeper. Group loyalties and universalist projects must interact without one swallowing the other. For this reason, there never was nor can there be a pure or absolute transracial politics as Sleeper claims.

The most destructive trend affecting New York and its expanding minority populations is new patterns of uneven development resulting in the abandonment of the city as the context for mainstream political life. In an insightful comment, which he does not allow to challenge his thesis on the universalism of political pluralism, Sleeper notes the changing political economy of the city: "In retrospect, one can say that the builders of New York's civic culture in the 1940s and 50s had taken advantage of a unique set of historical circumstances: industrial concentration amid growing American economic power; an unusual gathering of European socialist immigrants; the Empire State's special link to Washington through its former governor FDR and the New Deal. In the 1970s, the increasing liquidity of capital and mobility of corporations afforded much less room for municipal-sector development" (103). What this describes is the unique period of liberal growth politics from the New Deal to the early 1970s. Cities were able to generate sufficient public revenue such that economic expansion and political redistribution could occur harmoniously within municipal boundaries. As Swanstrom has observed, ". . . liberal growth politics reached its fullest potential in New York City. From LaGuardia to Lindsay, New York city built a local welfare state unsurpassed in the US. . . ."[16] The pluralist power and civilizing processes that Sleeper identifies as New York's liberal tradition were fueled by unique patterns of liberal growth politics.

The passing of liberal growth politics, the city's fiscal crisis of the 1970s (and now 90s), and Koch's conservative growth politics which provided incentives for capital to expand or divest at will, provided the necessary context for the race politics Sleeper otherwise describes so well. With the economy, welfare state, and largely white middle class in retreat, it may have seemed to urban blacks that

15. Lasch, *op. cit.*, pp. 393-402.

16. *Op. cit.*, p. 4-5. Cf. also John Mollenkopf, *The Contested City* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983).

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they were being abandoned by the flight of mainstream America to the suburbs and the sunbelt, and by the transformation of the urban economy into post-industrial forms (management and service functions). America's oldest cities are now being squeezed by losing resources, economic decentralizing trends and suburbanization on the one hand, and by conservative government policies which try to cut social expenditures while subsidizing white collar corporate expansion, on the other. It is now lunacy to speak of a return to a form of pluralist, civilizing, and assimilationist politics for workers and minorities in cities like New York, Chicago, St. Louis, Detroit, etc.

These new patterns help explain why by the 1970s urban blacks became an underclass. As described by Wilson, this class consists of ". . . individuals who lack training and skills and either experience long term unemployment or are not members of the labor force, individuals who are engaged in street crime and other forms of aberrant behavior, and families that experience long-term spells of poverty and/or welfare dependency."[17] Black male joblessness and female-centered families constitute the core of the ghetto underclass. This group is more socially dependent and marginalized than exploited by the corporate economy. While consisting of disproportionate numbers of blacks and other minorities, it is not necessarily the result of racial discrimination even if white suburbanites fear ghetto residents. In this view, the underclass or poverty issue is political-economic or organizational, not racial.

While "underclass" is a better concept than "racial discrimination" for understanding urban minorities, even as race remains relevant for constituting communities, the problem is that underclass advocates tend to favor redistributive and service-oriented government-administered social policies. Wilson's "program of economic reform" calls for "rational government involvement in the economy."[18] The solutions are defined in such a way that they perpetuate a political dependency of the poor on New Class beneficience. Moreover, from the New Class viewpoint, both explanations for and solutions to urban poverty are seen as complex, multi-variated, and holistic, thus implying that only those who have carefully studied all the complex variables can adequately prescribe responsible solutions. At least Sleeper had the wisdom to recognize that solutions start at home, not with "policy."

Too much of contemporary writing on race, poverty, or class is caught up in liberal traditions and New Class politics, from Sleeper's New York liberal tradition to the advocates of affirmative action, to social-democratic redistributive schemes. What they share is a blind faith in economic progress led by corporations, melting-pot pluralism and assimilation, centralized state power, America as a universal social order, education and individual mobility, and, of course, intellectually-driven policy analysis. Even Sleeper's generally

17. Wilson, *The Truly Disadvantaged, op. cit.*, p. 8. Cf. also Anderson, *op. cit.*

18. Wilson, *op. cit.*, p. 121. Cf. the statist approach in Christopher Jencks and Paul E. Peterson, eds., *The Urban Underclass* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institute, 1991).

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positive emphasis on community reflects liberalism's long standing concern for urban civility to soften the blows of capitalism than it is a concern for a populist politics of self-determination as producers and citizens.[19]

A populist alternative to liberalism takes self-determination to mean controlling or owning the economic and housing means of reproduction. While sounding far-fetched in a global economy, this outlook has always been a primary means of individual freedom and virtue, especially through collective associations based on family, ethnicity, trade, or residence. Thus, Asians, Middle-Eastern peoples, and Indians have made strongholds in the New York City metropolitan economy in large part by establishing small businesses in classic petty bourgeois style. Throughout the outer fringes of the city, even into the suburbs, one finds Indian newstands and fabric stores, Korean green grocers, Japanese restaurants, and West Indian bakeries.[20] In addition, residents of housing projects have been successful in taking over ownership or control of their housing, which not only generates pride of home and communal forms of social control, but also jobs: mini-stores and services, tenant management positions, and maintenance. In the Bronx recently, residents of an older tenement, led by a Hispanic woman, took over ownerhip of the building from the city, reflecting a growing trend "of low-income tenants who buy their apartments from the city and manage the buildings themselves."[21]

New Class proposals for welfare, education, affirmative action, voluntary associations, and ethnic-racial nationalism cannot produce the motivation and care people give to their lives when they have a stake in productive, self-sustaining activities. That is why New Class projects will always fail when they compete with commercial and home ownership projects as well as with street gangs and drug crime. What the urban poor need most of all is clear, unmediated access to their own traditions of self-determination and to credit. Neither the social-democratic redistribution of wealth nor conservative urban enterprise zones promote living traditions and cheap credit. Minimally, what the government can do is to assist those groups seeking access to low-interest loans or in founding community-based savings and loan associations. As Lawrence Goodwyn has shown, the popular control of credit as against centralizing banking institutions has been a core feature of American populism.[22]

The same principles apply to educational reforms. Schools work well only as communities concretely mediating public life: where parents are actively involved; where the curriculum is basic and not diverse or tracked, and reflective

19. On these themes, see Lasch, *op. cit.*; and Piccone and Ulmen, *op. cit.*

20. See "Ethnic Mosaic Grows Beyond New York," *New York Times*, April 17, 1991, B1.

21. "She Won't Give Up on a Place Called Home." *New York Times*, May 7, 1991, B1; cf. also David Osborne's study of the self-managed Kenilworth-Parkside public housing project in Washington, D.C. in "They Can't Stop Us Now," *The Washington Post Magazine*, July 30, 1989; and Roberta Brandes Gratz, *The Living City* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1989).

22. *The Populist Movement* (New York: Oxford, 1978).

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of the group's or the area's ways of life; where teachers can establish their curriculum with minimum administrative interference; and where educational achievement and graduation are linked to trades, jobs, and careers which are available in the school's immediate region. Unfortunately, such "good" schools, as Sara Lawrence Lightfoot has accurately called them, are few in America's cities.[23]

Some inner city schools are beginning to meet some of these criteria as "good" schools. A dominant feature of these schools is not only their relatively self-determining status as schools, strong principal authority defined in communal terms, but the fact that they have made efforts to hold local businesses accountable by guaranteeing the availability of jobs to high school students and graduates.[24] A major problem for ghetto children is less literacy or identity, which are incorrectly understood to be structural, requiring New Class reconstruction, than it is the student's belief that one's academic efforts will find no productive outlets or rewards.[25]

Yet the above forms of self-determination are inadequate to address new patterns of uneven development which are bipolarizing America along economic-occupational-urban-regional lines into two distinct societies. What was once described as a distinction in labor markets between primary and secondary sectors, easily overcome through education and mobility, has blossomed into an apartheid-like distinction between suburbanized regions of "post-industrial" affluence and urbanized regions of relatively unskilled impoverishment. With such rigid patterns of uneven development, the issue is primarily political or, as Reich has suggested, it raises the issue of the meaning of the American nation with such unequal occupational and life style opportunities shaped by a global corporate economy with no local allegiances. Neither the constructs of "civil society" or "underclass" nor social-democratic redistribution policies are sufficient to address these new issues.

The problem is that centralized management is inadequate for a class/regional divided society. Poorer cities have neither the economic nor political resources to sustain themselves, while affluent suburban regions and states have more than they need. The perception that "we" all suffer equally from the fiscal crisis of government these days is a clever ploy which masks corporate and New Class prosperity. This is a social-democratic issue only in the sense of the inequitable distribution of political power which must be rebalanced and decentralized as a condition of citizen empowerment.[26]

An urban populism operating within a decentralized federal system would

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23. *The Good High School* (New York: Basic Books, 1983).

24. Richard Louv, "Hope in Hell's Classroom," *New York Times Magazine* (November 25, 1990).

25. Cf. Stephen F. Hamilton, *Apprenticeship for Adulthood* (New York: Free Press, 1990).

26. These issues are taken up by Swanstrom, *op. cit.*; and by M. Gottdiener, *The Decline of Urban Politics* (Newbury Park, Ca: Sage, 1987); Harry C. Boyte and Frank Riessman (eds.), *The New Populism* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986); and Frank Bryan and John McClaughry, *The Vermont Papers* (Post Mills, Vermont: Chelsea Green, 1989).

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be empowered to deal with the following issues in ways that statist power cannot.[27] First, the dependency of cities on local financial elites and institutions would have to be abated. Cities should be empowered to meet their credit needs through new taxing schemes, loans from larger branches of government or, as in the case of West German cities, form their own municipal savings bank. Second, cities should be empowered to tax unearned incomes and profits, such as commuters who work and recreate in the city but live and pay property taxes elsewhere, and speculatively high-priced land and building developments which concentrate business and professional services in downtown districts. Third, federal and state taxing policies which currently favor the middle class, the military, and the suburbs (including overly-subsidized schools), must be redrawn in favor of cities so that more capital can remain within their boundaries and be reinvested in more productive activities. Finally, such proposals must come from below as issues emerging out of a conflictual process of achieving community self-determination, or participatory democracy which directly links citizens in communities to urban-based political parties and municipal forms of government. Nothing less can address the issue of race and save America as a nation with universal aspirations for freedom and democracy.

John Alt

27. Here I draw from Swanstrom, *op. cit.*, pp. 225-245. Also relevant here is Jane Jacobs' arguments regarding the importance of cities being economically self-sufficient in *Cities and the Wealth of Nations* (New York: Random House, 1984).

Marx and Modernism

David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity* (Oxford, UK: Basil Blackwell Ltd, 1989) ix + 378 pp.

In a remarkably readable way, David Harvey explores how postmodern culture mirrors the latest dynamic of capitalism: flexible accumulation. Admittedly a latecomer to the postmodern turn, Harvey has quit expecting this aesthetic wave to faddishly fade and undertakes a serious study of it. Like Eagleton's assessment, Harvey's is bleak: postmodernism is the cultural face of voodoo economics, the avantgarde of consumerism. Rarely has the imagination shown such complicity in the current business ethos. The polemic against postmodernism

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interspersed throughout the text calls for renewed critical theory and political activism. It is time for oppositional forces to move from aesthetics to an ethical front, although Harvey is not convincing on how such rerouting might occur.

This book evokes the qualities of intellectual life largely absent from scholarship. Harvey draws from a wide variety of sources — historical, philosophical, literary, economic — to evaluate the social transformations engulfing us. Less technical than the earlier text, *The Urban Experience* (1989), this book is written for a public who might need a thumbnail sketch of Foucault's findings or a quick review of relative surplus value. By skirting the insiders' debates, Harvey invites the mainstream to a persuasive version of historical materialism — or historical-geographical materialism — that argues for the life of "meta-narratives." Marx, not as a Marxist but as a great theorist of modernity, the one who best comprehends the dynamic to which postmodernism responds is the hero of this narrative. From Marx, we learn both about the crises native to capitalism and how stability is restored, e.g., by intensified space-time compression.

Harvey's discussion is guided by the question: does postmodernism, the "sea change in cultural, political, and economic practices since 1972," signify the onset of a postcapitalist society or the latest transformation within capitalism and modernity? The following alternatives are resisted: those finding nothing new or those heralding the emergence of a more democratic economy and liberated sensibility. Harvey concludes that postmodernism greatly heightens the tendencies towards fragmentation inherent within modernism since 1848 without breaking in the slightest from the growth imperative of capitalism that discharges periodically into crisis. The postmodern effervescence rides the dramatic restructuring of spatial and temporal practices since the 1973 recession; the fictional capital of the "casino" economy is the counterpart to the "depthless surfaces" of the postmodern. The signifiers set wandering parallel the global quests of free-floating finance no longer defined by dollars or fixed monetary forms. The intertextuality of deconstruction affirms in the realm of thought the real subsumption of all human experience under the value form. As we do not get "outside" the text, we do not break free of the market even in the imagination. A family resemblance is traced between the politics of the image (Reaganism), the restructuring of production and labor (neo-entrepreneurialism), literary deconstruction, postmodern spectacle, and neo-conservative ideology. The disconnected "other" — celebrated in theory and "produced with a vengeance in reality" (60) — serves as a warning of the lure and risks of the postmodern turn.

The four divisions of the book exemplify Harvey's non-dogmatic approach to historical materialism, which emphasizes "internal relations" rather than causal determination. The opening section summarizing the aesthetic movements of modernism and postmodernism is followed by a section contrasting the "regulation school" economics of Fordism and flexible accumulation. Crisis and class struggle are active agents in Marx' legacy, but Harvey focuses primarily on "steering crises" in Habermas' sense. Beginning with the economic and political collapse of 1848 through the World Wars and the 1973 global recession, phases

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of modernity are linked to crises. Crises provoke the peculiar genius of capitalism to devise new growth strategies, such as Keynesian practices, or more recently, sub-contracting, debt financing, and service production. A time-honored response to crisis is space-time compression — the speed-ups, restructurings, relocations, deskilling, quicker turnovers, and expansions that shrink the globe and enhance the realization of value.

Harvey's distinctive voice is evident in the third section, associating diverse experiences of space and time with struggles for power and profit. He observes that social theory traditionally privileges time while aesthetics is more attuned to space. A more encompassing critical theory recognizes how space and time intertwine in connection with particular social practices. No placid metaphysical principles, space and time are the fault lines on which upheavals in the realm of material practices rattle the spaces of representation or imagination. Tremors passing in reverse have been too weak to register in recent years; capitalism has simply proven more dauntingly creative than the cultural or political movements that might contest it. The oppositional edge apparent in earlier periods of modernism has largely disappeared into noncomittal, indifferent fictions. At its present speed, "reality gets created rather than interpreted" (306).

Harvey's pessimistic evaluation of postmodernism is mainly reserved for the fragmentary chapters of the fourth section. Contradictions abound in the current scene, such as the thrill of liberation on the death of the meta-narrative, side by side with an exhaustive commodification of every social nook. We are least able to speak about totalizing forces just when capitalism's penetration of the lifeworld is most acute. Films such as *Wings of Desire* or *Bladerunner* depict enormous power thriving in the midst of social debris and human isolation — the fragments extolled in postmodernism. For these filmmakers, hope lingers in the possibility of romance or communication — even with replicants or fallen angels. Harvey would prefer a hint of solidarity among the dispossesed.

The diverse mediations between economic structures and political-cultural forms carries Harvey beyond dogmatism but not far enough. The trouble is not simply his aside that myths would no longer be necessary under socialism, since the imagination could carry out its dreams in reality (110). Further mediations between "base" and "superstructure" are required. Harvey reverses Kant's strategy; rather than aesthetics mediating the split between nature and freedom, ethics should step into the breech. But it is unlikely that categorical imperatives or republican politics are what he has in mind. How can ethics or politics traverse the economic straits that reduce culture to such accommodation? Is principled action more feisty than the imagination in contesting the given rules? Through what institutions or movements is solidarity expressed today? The diversity of spatial and temporal practices which survive the saturation of capitalist forms may be the seedbed for active resistance. Where is the clash, e.g., friction between home time and time on line? Where the potential struggles for turf or time might occur is grist for speculation that is missing here.

Harvey's understanding of modernism accommodates postmodernism within

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it as an inherent tendency. Baudelaire best summed up the cultural dialectic for Harvey: "Modernity is the transient, the fleeting, the contingent; it is one half of art, the other being the eternal and the immutable" (10). The ancient contest between Being and Becoming is born anew in the Enlightenment with the recognition that destruction and creativity are inseparable. How can I rebuild the mind, wonders Descartes, without first destroying it? Out of the rubble of former beliefs will arise invincible certainties. By the 19th century, Nietzsche recognized how chaos repeatedly overwhelmed order. In Harvey's chronicle, trust in absolutes dissolved in the flood of divergent perspectives that swept over Europe after 1848. The finest rational methods were no match against the violent forces of dispersal.

From this aesthetic turn — form created as a respite from the strife of becoming — Harvey locates the recurring dilemma of modernity: the recourse to images or myths instead of action or critique. Rather than transform reality, substitutes are found for it. The stirring moments of modernity occurred when Baudelaire's tension was lived: the hunger for eternal truths or meaning persisted in the midst of social upheaval. "If flux and change, ephemerality and fragmentation, formed the material basis of modern life . . . the individual artist could contest them, embrace them, try to dominate them, or simply swim within them, but the artist could never ignore them" (20). The oppositional presence of modernism faltered between the wars, first in pursuit of heroic myths (the machine, strong leader, the aura of place, internationalism) and secondly in comfortable complicity with a consumer society. The obsolescence of "alienation" marks the decline of modernity from vibrant cultural movement to establishment ideology.

With postmodernism, the assimilation of culture peaks; the tension between ephemeral and enduring simply vanishes. What remains is surface untroubled by depths, present unlinked from future or past, signs signifying signs, successions of fragments, transgression of boundaries, pluralizing of realities, spectacle in place of engagement. Never before has a cultural movement celebrated the flux with so few qualms. "Postmodernism swims, even wallows, in the fragmentary and the chaotic currents of change as if that is all there is" (44).

Some positive aspects of postmodernity are mustered. Harvey admits that a legitimate case against the Enlightenment must be reckoned with. Modernity was often enthralled by technology and power. The mathematical grid flattened experience; planning sacrificed complexity to control and unity. In urban renewal, history was often ignored and heterogeneity squeezed out. Function eliminated ornament and mass production leveled consumers to a homogeneous mass. But the villainy of the Enlightenment has been grossly overplayed in the postmodern press. For example, Harvey suggests that the zeal to map the world did not pose a threat to traditional ways until maps were drafted in the service of commerce and conquest. A diagnosis of social ills must look past the Enlightenment to capitalism.

Though sympathetic to the heightened recognition of "otherness" that

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emerges from postmodern critiques, Harvey notes that the worker described by Marx was the original "other." However, distinctions of class, race, and gender, dutifully noted, vanish into the babble of differences going nowhere. The ghetto emerges for Harvey as the postmodern image of liberation: differences are ghettoized and poverty aestheticized. Without any political or ethical basis for solidarity across lines, recognizing the "other" proves a shallow gesture, the fashion of the moment. The cultivation of local images of "place" lures investment and spawns a heritage industry. Postmodernism is remarkable for its affinity to status capital in a consumer society. Its "diversity" better reflects the emporium of styles in a global market than respect for the underdog or invitation to the excluded. As the aesthetic of money — both fictions that disguise realities — postmodernism poses fewer challenges to the *status quo* than previous periods of modernity. "Postmodern concerns for the signifier rather than the signified, the medium (money) rather than the message (social labor), the emphasis on fiction rather than function, on signs rather than things, on aesthetics rather than ethics, suggests a reinforcement rather than a transformation of the role of money as Marx depicts it" (102).

Harvey finds the "regulation school" of economic theorists (Aglietta, Boyer, Lipietz) most helpful in charting the social transformations interwoven with postmodern culture. Crisis is assumed as endemic to capitalism. Stability may be achieved for longer or shorter periods through a holistic structuring of society: a regime of accumulation. According to these sources, the regime of accumulation that organized capitalism for decades, Fordism, is giving way through recession and crisis to a regime of flexible accumulation. Fordism was a relatively long-term solution to accumulation and growth problems; flexible accumulation, Harvey conjectures, is a shorter-term, more precarious fix to the inherent volatility of production for profit. Regulation theory has the advantage of holding together the structural innovations that redirect the economy with the social/psychological processes that insure growth. Fordism, from this view, revolutionized the means of production while fostering expectations that automobiles and consumerism were central to the good life. Skills and control over production were traded for income that would insure suitable demand for mass produced goods. Government promoted the alliances and military build-up as well as the social benefits and infrastructure that made expansion possible; unions secured the cooperation of the labor elite to redesigned jobs in exchange for affluence; capital supplied the technological innovations and standardizations that made mass production possible. Rationalized and large-scale production created economic boom years after 1945 and brought a rising standard of living to a large public.

However, the main economic forces under Fordism: Big Business, Big Labor, and Big Government were intertwined in a "dysfunctional embrace" that made strategic responses to crisis difficult. Only continual growth could sustain the Fordist enterprise. Through bouts of inflation and recession, the Fordist-Keynesian solution unraveled and so-called flexible strategies realigned the key players in a groping effort to reignite growth.

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What sets flexible accumulation apart from Fordism is the increased autonomy of finance capital and the loss of US clout in the global market. The former equilibrium between organized labor, the state, and big business is undercut by new financing practices, communication systems, and deregulation that allow money to flow rapidly to the hottest investment site. Speed-up heightens the economic mood through quick product turnover, fashion hype, custom design, labor and commodity devaluation, plant closings, reindustrialization, creative accounting for short-term gains, and image production. Big production lines are dispersed through sub-contracting, temporaries, decentralized workplaces, economies of scope rather than scale, and geographical mobility. Strategies to increase demand while maintaining low inventories realize earnings above the price of production. "Playing the volatility right" marks the economic genius of the day. The entrepreneurial climate that yields new enterprises masks the consolidation of power and the increased role of government intervention which simultaneously occurs. Class lines ironically grow more rigid under flexible accumulation even while class struggle is less likely to be provoked in the era of heightened individualism and swift labor "discipline." Crude strategies of absolute surplus value, e.g., longer hours, less pay, paternalistic workshops, are timely again. Despite flexible schedules that relieve pressure on the household, the role of workers is fragile in this transition. The resources which might secure concessions for labor, e.g., international forms of solidarity and promotion of workers' rights, are hardly discernable.

Though Harvey manages a measured tone generally, his judgment of present sensibilities is harsh. The postmodern spell must be broken before opposition can take shape. The older impulse of modernity — to strain after meaning in the midst of flux — deserves to be recovered. Modernity in most phases did not pose the dangers reported. While a genuine avant-garde flourished before WWI, postmodern sensibilities colonize consciousness and "naturalize the arbitrariness" of the social order. We are encouraged to drift further away from critical thinking and concerted action as aesthetics undermines ethics and politics. Thinkers such as Lyotard or Rorty are simplistic, even silly in their political reflections; deconstruction, in Harvey's view, bears responsibility for the political enfeeblement of the "language games" metaphor of the times. "In challenging all consensual standards of truth and justice, of ethics, and meaning, in pursuing the dissolution of all narratives and meta-theories into a diffuse universe of language games, deconstructionism ended up, in spite of the best intentions of its more radical practitioners, by reducing knowledge and meaning to a rubble of signifiers. It thereby produced a condition of nihilism that prepared the ground for the re-emergence of a charismatic politics and even more simplistic propositions than those which were deconstructed" (350). By undermining critical theory, deconstruction tacitly feeds into the politics of collaboration.

Efforts by Baudrillard, Jameson, and Deleuze, "to ride the tiger" of space-time compression in language that mimics its volatility can perpetuate disorientation or result in risky conjecture, e.g., on the liberatory edge to schizophrenia.

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Harvey cautiously sympathizes for the espousal of regional politics and local oppositions, as long as place is not mythologized and "we think globally and act locally." Lefebvre, Bourdieu, Simmel and Marshall Berman, along with the regulation theorists, are the guides to the present Harvey draws upon steadily.

Harvey continues to be among the finest reinterpreters of Marx, one of the few to bring a superb grasp of the texts into interaction with contemporary social and economic theory. Like Habermas, he revives modest Enlightenment aspirations to a progressive social order, but remains open to class struggle and labor politics. Harvey's sophisticated handling of Marx' categories does not bog down in academic debate; he is out to interpret the world in ways that encourage practical responses. He goes too far, however, in attributing the "failures" of the New Left to an abandonment of Marxist analysis and labor solidarity for an "aestheticized" politics of personal liberation — the precursor to postmodernism. And apart from some notice of the Rainbow Coalition, little attention is paid to the terms in which political/ethical renewal and class struggle might be energized today. The aesthetic turn was taken, in part, because of the inability of traditional discourse to comprehend rapidly splintering 19th century experiences. Alienation slid from favor because it no longer clarified the dilemmas of capitalism. Harvey pleads the reverse: Marx's central categories are urgently relevant to an understanding of our situation. Without some measured trust in the modernist creed — to decipher meanings from the ferment of the present — the openings for change created by the current crisis cannot be siezed.

The recurring dilemma that threatens Critical Theory is never far: how to fathom the depths of domination without swamping all negation. How does ethics take shape in the midst of time-space compression? What is the look of politics in hyper-space? How does class struggle ensue in a global market? Postmodernism describes a pervasive social alignment that inhibits resistance. If oppositional energies derive from cracks in the given context, then aesthetic values may suggest the political discourse audible today — ethics filtered through aesthetic space. The specific contradictions immanent to postmodernism which could provoke self-overcoming are not developed here. Consequently, the ethical-political turn appears wishful. But why quibble with a work of this integrity? Harvey's silence on these questions differs amply from the silence of deconstruction, since at least he is searching for ways to activate the absence. Harvey appeals in the end to hope that more decent measures will struggle somehow into existence. "It becomes possible to launch a counterattack of narrative against the image, of ethics against aesthetics, of a project of Becoming rather than Being, and to search for unity within difference, albeit in a context where the power of the image and of aesthetics, the problems of time-space compression, and the significance of geopolitics and otherness are clearly understood. A renewal of historical-geographical materialism can indeed promote adherence to a new version of the Enlightenment project" (359).

Jeanne Schuler

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